Spiral
THE BONDS OF REASONING
4
Story by Kyo Shirodaira
Art by Eita Mizuno

Spiral

THE BONDS OF REASONING

4

STORY/KYO SHIRODAIRA ART/EITA MIZUNO

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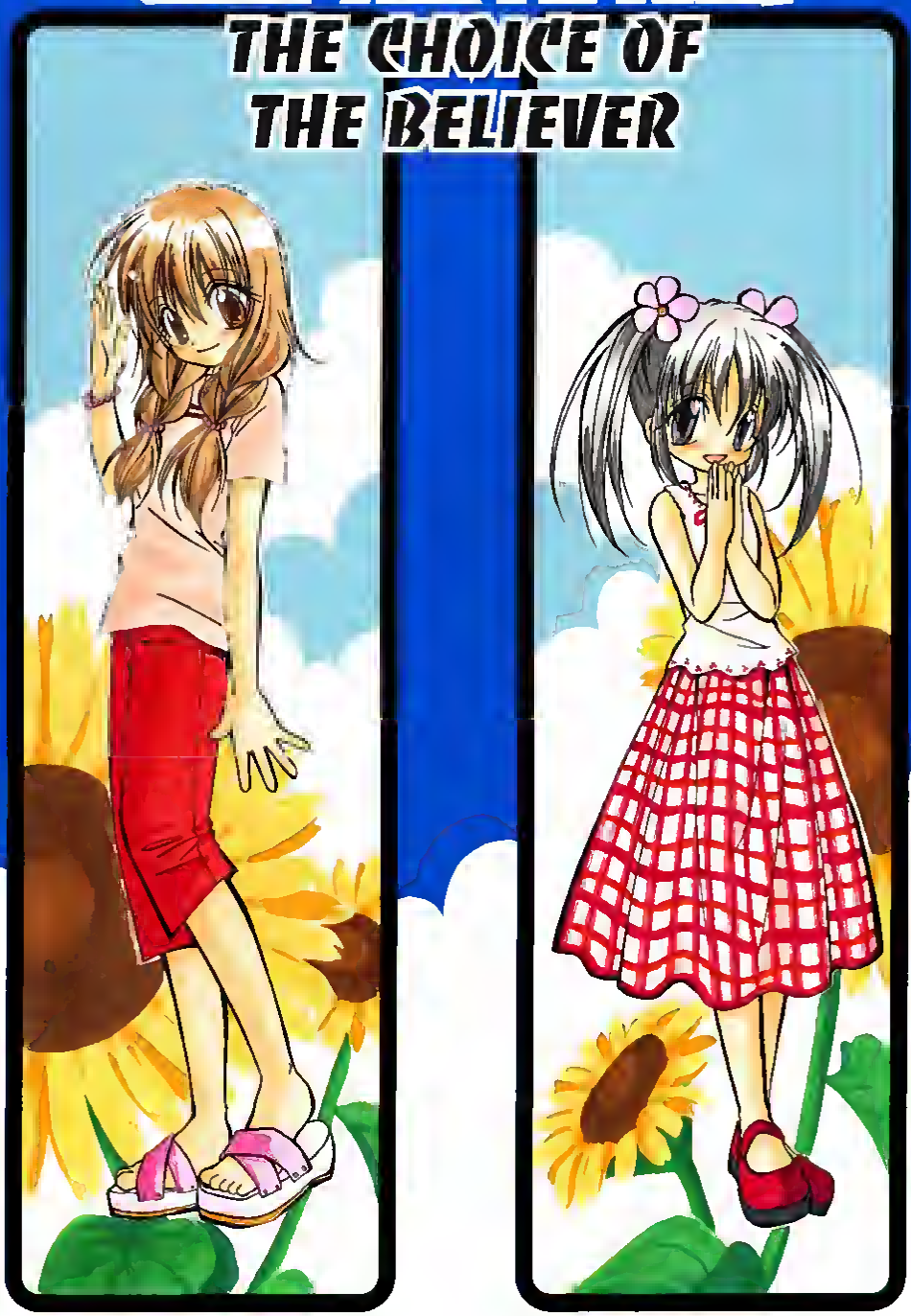
CHAPTER FIFTEEN
THE CHOICE OF THE BELIEVER



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THIS ISN'T SETTLED YET.

NARUMI-SAN HASN'T LOST TO YOU...
...SO GIVE US ANOTHER MATCH.
SURE, I ONLY WON THROUGH TRICKERY.
BUT THAT DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACT THAT LITTLE BROTHER LOST.
?
HMPH
HE SHOULD KNOW THAT ALL TOO WELL HIMSELF.

HE'S ALREADY ACKNOWLEDGED HIS DEFEAT BY ADMITTING THAT HE COULDN'T SEE THROUGH THE TRICK.
WHAT YOU SEE THERE...
...IS A COWARDLY LOSER WHO DOESN'T EVEN BELIEVE IN HIMSELF.
むぅ
MU (HMPH)
IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT LITTLE BROTHER SHOULD DIE.
HE'S AN IDIOT FOR RUNNING AWAY WITH HIS TAIL BETWEEN HIS LEGS...
PLEASE DON'T GET SO COCKY!

NARUMI-SAN HAD A SWORD HE COULD STRIKE YOU DOWN WITH.
ALL YOU DID WAS MANAGE TO PARRY HIS BLOW SOME-HOW.
YOU NEVER EVEN HAD THE MEANS TO REALLY KILL HIM, DID YOU!?
.....
WHY DIDN'T YOU USE REAL POISON?
KNOWING WHICH WAS WHICH, WHY DIDN'T YOU MAKE A REAL DEATH MATCH OF IT...
...RATHER THAN JUST STICK WITH A SAFE TRICK, LIKE YOU DID?
IF YOU REALLY WANTED TO BEAT NARUMI-SAN...
...YOU SHOULD'VE BELIEVED IN YOUR OWN LUCK AND PUT YOUR OWN LIFE ON THE LINE IN THIS MATCH.
BUT INSTEAD, YOU ONLY FOOLED HIM USING A CHEAP TRICK!

...THAT YOU'D BE THE ONE TO CHOOSE THE POISON.
...YOU'D LOSE FOR SURE AGAINST NARUMI-SAN...
YOU KNEW THAT IF YOU ACTUALLY CHALLENGED HIM WITH-OUT ANY TRICKS...
YOU KNEW...
YOU WERE AFRAID OF NARUMI-SAN'S POWER.
IT WAS YOU WHO WAS RUNNING AWAY FROM THE START.
YOU MAY NOT BE AFRAID OF BOMBS...
...BUT YOU'RE AFRAID OF NARUMI-SAN.

SO YOU CAN'T PUFF OUT YOUR CHEST AND BOAST ABOUT YOUR VICTORY JUST YET!
.....
MY, WHAT A FRIGHTENING INDIVIDUAL.
SHE SURE KNOWS HOW TO HIT ME WHERE IT HURTS...
BUT THAT WILL BE...
...YOUR DOWN-FALL.

I'VE BEEN GIVEN CERTAIN CONSTRAINTS BY KIYOTAKA-SAMA FOR KILLING HIS LITTLE BROTHER.
BUT HE NEVER SAID ANYTHING ABOUT HOW TO DEAL WITH ANY-BODY ELSE.
I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU ALREADY.
SO YOU INTEND TO KILL ME TOO?
JUST LIKE YOU DID IMAZATO-SENSEI?
IF YOU GET IN MY WAY...
...I WON'T BE CHOOSY ABOUT HOW TO DISPOSE OF YOU.
A MURDER LIKE THAT'S A PIECE OF CAKE.
AND I'M NOT AFRAID TO KILL ANY OF MY ENEMIES.
I FINISHED IMAZATO-SENSEI OFF WITH ONE STRIKE.

I WAS WAITING FOR YOU TO SAY THAT.
カチ
KACHI (CLICK)
!?
NIKO (SMILE)
YOU SURPRISED TO HEAR THAT?
I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF RECORDING...
...OUR ENTIRE CONVERSATION!
!!

IT'S BEEN RECORDING EVER SINCE I STEPPED INTO THIS ROOM, BUT...
...I WAS STARTING TO GET WORRIED YOU WOULDN'T SAY THE CRUCIAL WORDS I NEEDED TO HEAR.
I'M SURE YOU WERE ON YOUR GUARD FOR A WHILE.
BUT IN THE END, YOU SLIPPED UP.
THIS IS JUST THE FOOTHOLD THEY NEED TO GET YOU ARRESTED, RIO-SAN.
HA!
YOU JUST ADMITTED TO KILLING IMAZATO-SENSEI, DIDN'T YOU HEAR YOURSELF?
AND YOU THREATENED TO KILL ME TOO.
EVIDENCE LIKE THIS IS PRETTY SOLID, GOT IT?

WELL, TRUMP CARDS ARE ALWAYS SAVED TILL THE END, RIGHT?
UFUFU!
YOU REALLY SHOWED US, LITTLE LADY!
...WHAT IS IT YOU WANT?
YOU'RE NOT THE TYPE TO MERELY WANT TO SELL ME TO THE POLICE, NOW ARE YOU?
...HI-YONO-SAN...
.....
AND THAT'S FOR A REMATCH BETWEEN YOU AND NARUMI-SAN!
YOU'RE RIGHT. I HAVE ONE WISH.

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU THINK-ING!?
AH...
THIS IS YOU WE'RE TALK-ING ABOUT, NARUMI-SAN. REMEMBER?
YOU DON'T MIND. RIGHT?
.....
KOUSUKE-KUN!
EH?
HYU (WHIP)

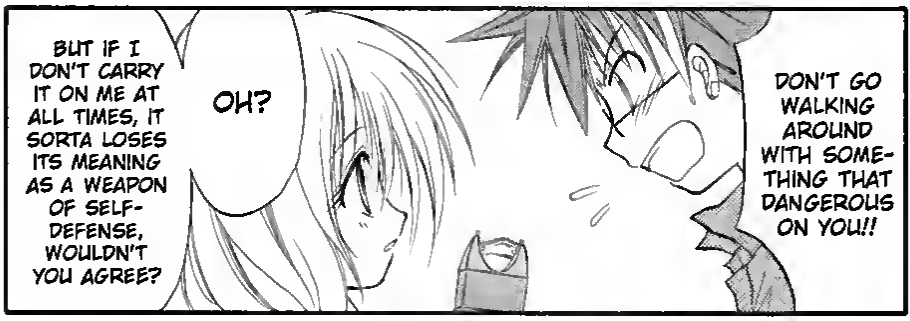
GASHAN (CRASH)
GO (THUD)
WHY, YOU LITTLE BITCH ...!
GA (BANG)
HYAH!
GAN (KICK)
NA-RU-MI-SAN!
HA (GASP)

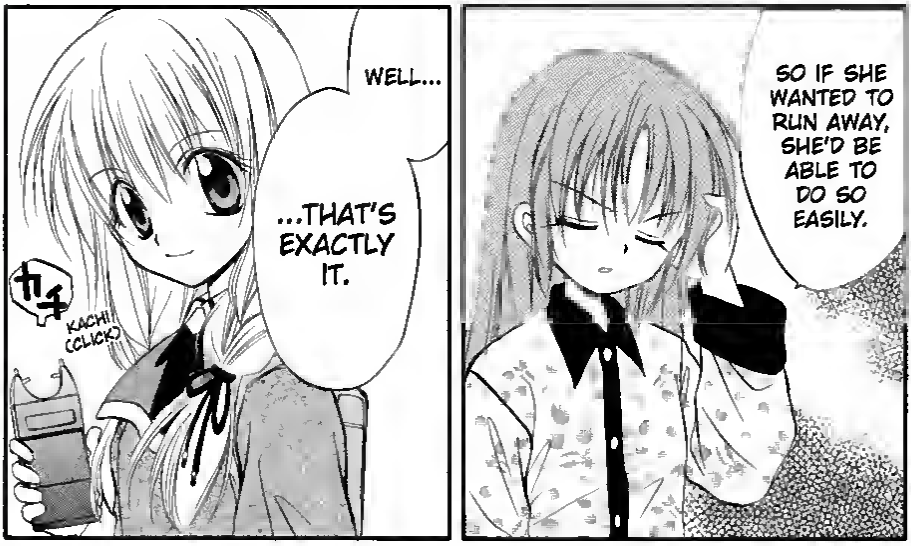
GUI (WRENCH)
!
TCH!
PASHI (SNATCH)
OH, DEAR...
...BUT I'M JUST GETTING STARTED!
YOU WENT TOO FAR...
NARUMI-SAN, PLEASE GET AWAY!
...LITTLE LADY.

AS LONG AS WE HAVE THAT, I'LL BE SAFE!
HURRY UP!
.....!
HURRY!!
JIRI (SQUEAK)
DA (DASH)
.....
...NO NEED TO CHASE AFTER HIM.

KOU-SUKE-KUN.
YOU'D BETTER TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF OF HER RIGHT AWAY.
WHAT? BUT SHE'LL RUN AWAY ON US, CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?
OH, WELL.
AS LONG AS WE'VE GOT THE LITTLE LADY UNDER CONTROL, THAT'S PRETTY GOOD, RIGHT?
OVER THERE.
POCHI (CLICK)
NIKO (SMILE)

PA (RELEASE)
ぱっ
...SAY HELLO TO MY DELUXE TASER!
SET AT ONE MILLION VOLTS, THE MAX VOLTAGE SETTING... ENOUGH TO BRING DOWN EVEN A BEAR...
バチ
BACHI (BZZT)


DON'T GO WALKING AROUND WITH SOMETHING THAT DANGEROUS ON YOU!!
OH?
BUT IF I DON'T CARRY IT ON ME AT ALL TIMES, IT SORTA LOSES ITS MEANING AS A WEAPON OF SELF-DEFENSE, WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?


SO IF SHE WANTED TO RUN AWAY, SHE'D BE ABLE TO DO SO EASILY.
WELL...
...THAT'S EXACTLY IT.
カチ
KACHI (CLICK)

WHY DIDN'T YOU RUN AWAY, THEN?
NIKO (BEAM)
にっ
GETTING MYSELF TAKEN HOSTAGE IS THE WAY TO SPUR ON NARUMI-SAN'S FIGHTING SPIRIT, SEE?
にっ?
WHA!?
BUT...
...THAT KID BROTHER RAN AWAY ALL BY HIMSELF.
THAT WASN'T THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR HIM TO MAKE.
YOU REALLY WANT THE TWO OF US TO HAVE A REMATCH, DON'T YOU?
HE LOST TO ME, SOMETHING HE'LL HARDLY BE ABLE TO BOUNCE BACK FROM. AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, HE RAN OFF LEAVING BEHIND A GIRL IN DANGER.
IF HE WERE TO TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT HIMSELF NOW, I'M SURE IT'D BE QUITE A BLOW TO HIS MENTAL STATE.

THAT HE PUT AN END TO IT IS ALSO TO BE EXPECTED.
IF HE'S GOING TO FALL, HE'S BETTER OFF FALLING AS FAR AS POSSIBLE.
THE GREATER THE DISTANCE THEY HAVE TO CRAWL BACK UP...
...THE STRONGER AND MORE AMAZING BOYS BECOME.
.....
THE SITUATION'S SURE GOTTEN COMPLICATED.

SO WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT HIYONO GIRL?
WE'VE LOCKED HER UP IN THE MEANTIME.
YEAH, I GUESS.
...WHERE'S NARUMI JUNIOR NOW?
THEN...
SEEING AS SHE WILLINGLY MADE HERSELF A HOSTAGE, I DOUBT SHE'LL TRY TO ESCAPE...
WE HAVEN'T TRACKED HIM DOWN YET.

WE FIGURE HE WON'T BE GOING HOME FOR A WHILE, SO...
...HE MIGHT HAVE IT TOUGH BEING ON THE RUN.
ZU (SLIDE)
WAS I RIGHT IN RUNNING AWAY?

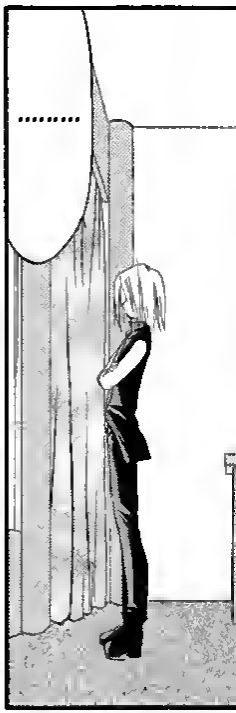
WAS IT RIGHT FOR ME TO RUN... AND LEAVE HER BEHIND?
WAS IT RIGHT FOR ME... TO RUN AWAY... BACK THEN?
WHY...
DAMN IT...
WHY AM I LIKE THIS!?
WHY AM I...

...HOW DO I TRACK THIS GUY DOWN?

NOW THEN...

NARUMI JUNIOR'S WANDERING THE CITY UNDER THE COVER OF NIGHT, LEAVING IT ALL BEHIND AFTER LOSING.

AND ON TOP OF THAT, THE TIDE COMPLETELY CHANGED THANKS TO THAT HIYONO GIRL.
RIO WON AGAINST NARUMI JUNIOR, BUT SHE COULDN'T KILL HIM.


.....

RATHER THAN THE STRENGTH IT TAKES TO NOT LOSE...

...IT'S THE STRENGTH TO STAND BACK UP AFTER A LOSS THAT IS SOMETIMES MORE VALUABLE.

I DON'T HAVE A SINGLE CLUE.
NOTHING ON THE IRISES OR THE BLADE CHIL-DREN...
SFX: KA (CLICK) KA KA
NO LEADS TODAY EITHER...
カツ カツ カツ…
KIYO-TAKA-SAN...
WHERE ARE YOU RIGHT NOW?
AYUMU?
I'M HOME. WHERE'S DINNER?

SHIN
(SILENCE)
CHA
(KACHAK)
AYUMU
...?
.....
AYUMU?
GOTON
(CLUNK)
SU
(PASS)

WAIT... THIS FEELING...

IT'S JUST LIKE BACK WHEN KIYOTAKA-SAN DISAPPEARED.

EVEN THOUGH UP UNTIL THEN HE WAS ALWAYS THERE FOR ME, LIKE THE AIR I BREATHED.

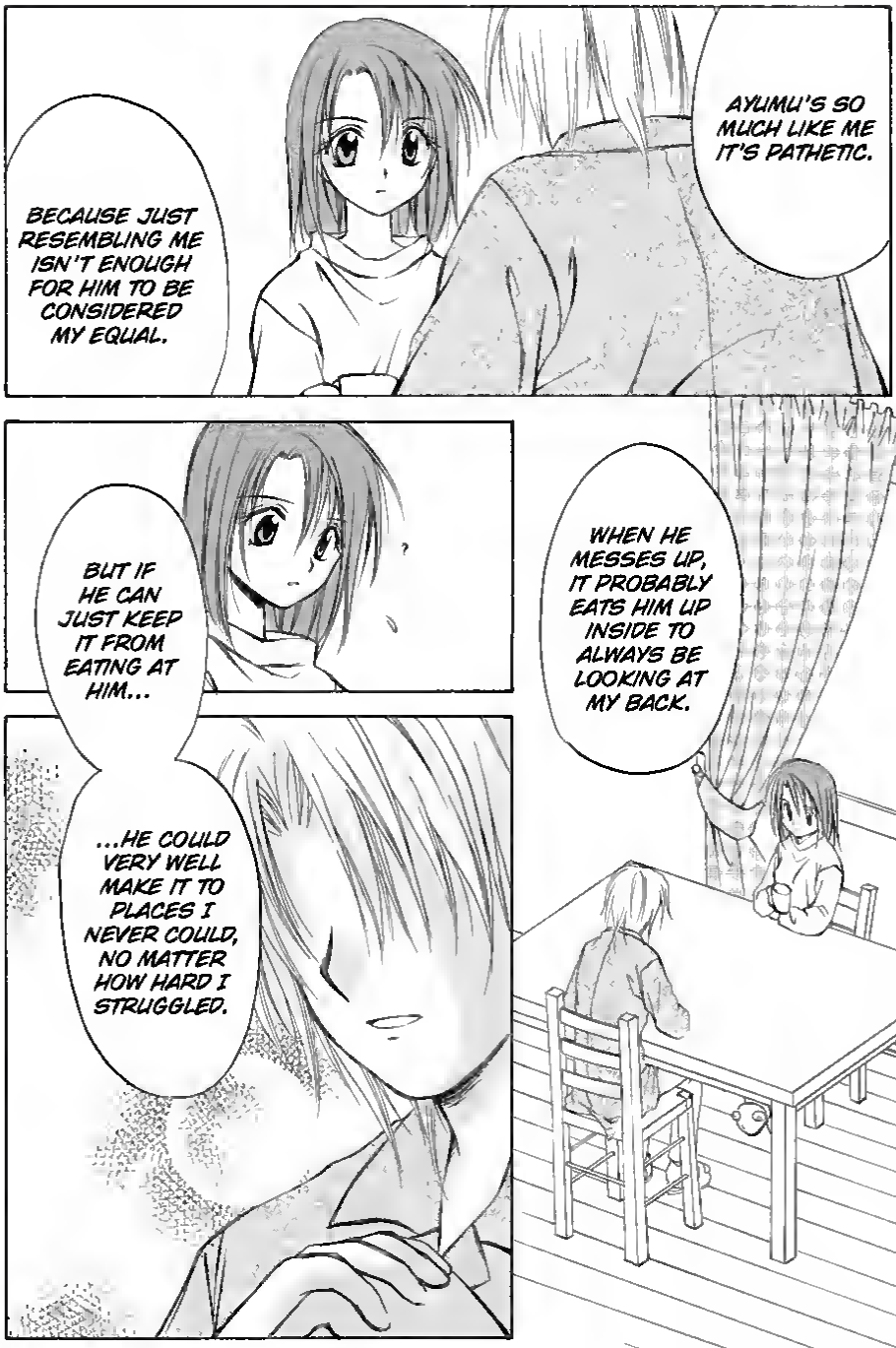
AND THEN, WITHOUT WARNING, HE SUDDENLY VANISHED.

GACHA (KLICK)
AYU-MU !?
HA (GASP)
PURURURURURU (RRRRING) PURURURURU
.....
KIDS SHOULD NOT BE OUT AND ABOUT AT THIS HOUR!!
It's just nine o'clock. Get with the times. Elementary school kids aren't even asleep right now.
WHAT'RE YOU YELLING FOR?
Do you have any idea what time it is now!?

OH YEAH.
I'LL BE STAYING AT A FRIEND'S HOUSE TONIGHT, SO YOU MAKE SURE YOU EAT YOUR MEAL.
AND YOU'RE IN CHARGE OF WAKING YOURSELF UP TOMORROW.
SU (SWOOSH)
Ayumu! Don't hang up!!
Wait ...!
Tomor-row...
Tomorrow, make sure you come home. Okay?
I WON'T HAVE YOU DISAPPEARING ON ME LIKE KIYOTAKA-SAN DID, YOU HEAR ME?
YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME BY MYSELF TOO, OKAY...?

I'M NOT LIKE MY BROTHER...
I'M NOTHING LIKE MY BROTHER...
I'M NOT LIKE MY BROTHER.
I'M A HELPLESS, WEAK, COWARDLY LOSER WHO CAN'T EVEN BELIEVE IN HIMSELF.
OF COURSE. I'M NOT LIKE MY BROTHER...
WHAT'S WRONG!?
YOU'RE ACTING WEIRD!
Y-
WELL, GOOD-NIGHT...
...SIS.
NOTHING'S WRONG.

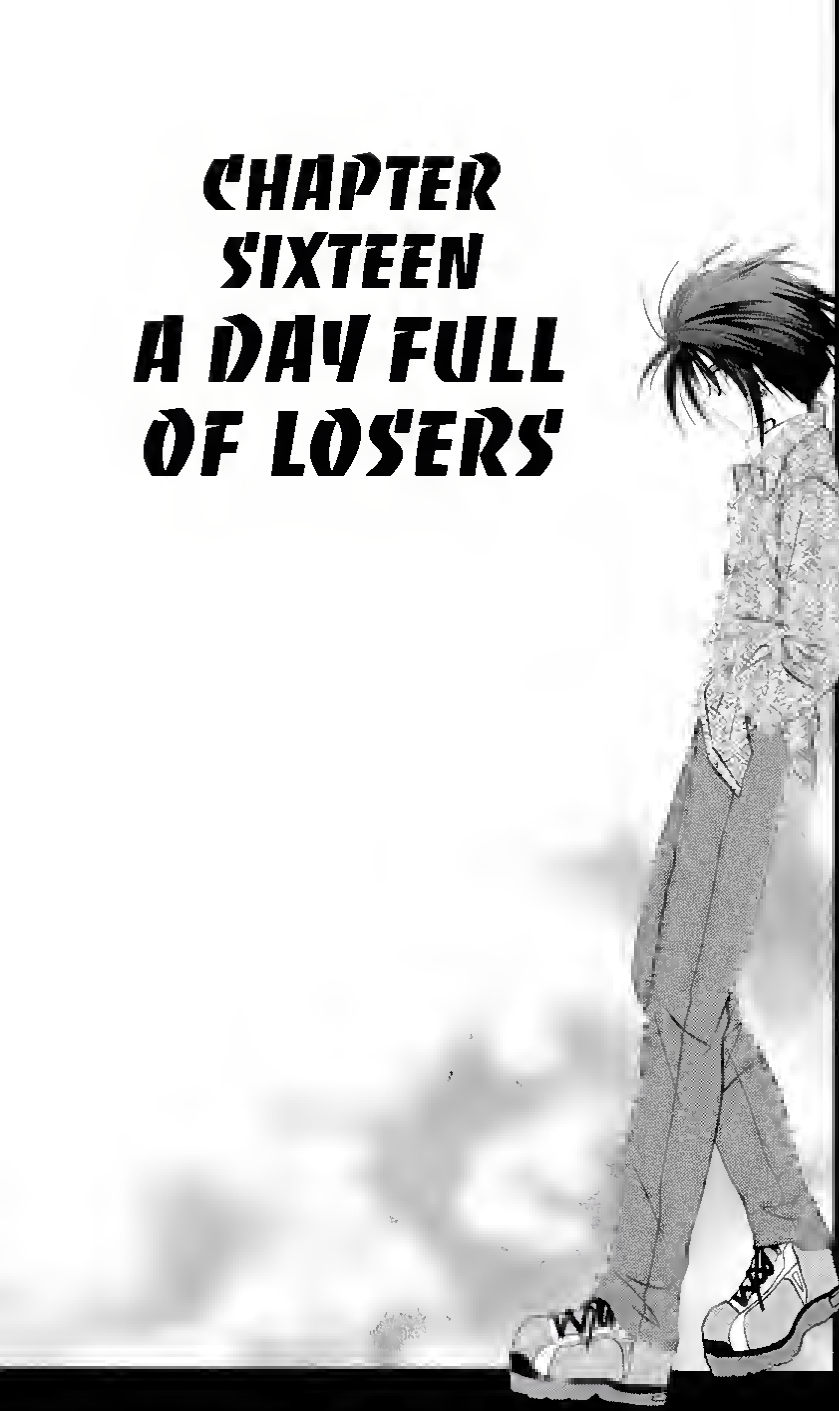
.....
KUSHA (RUSTLE)
GASHAN (SLAM)
AYUMU ...?
WHY'D HE SAY THAT IN SUCH A PAINED VOICE...?
HE'S NOT LIKE KIYOTAKA-SAN...?

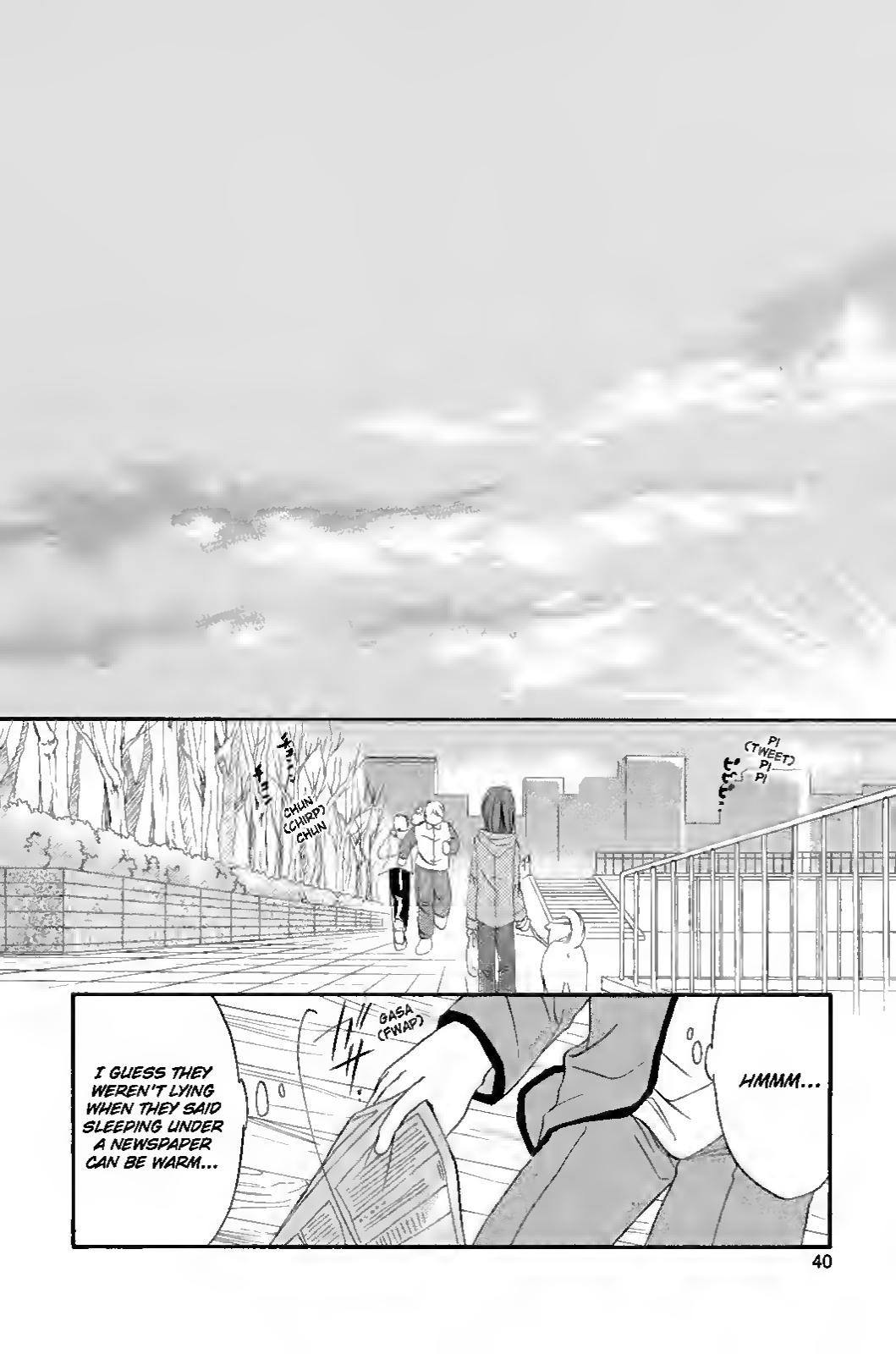

AYUMU'S SO MUCH LIKE ME IT'S PATHETIC.
BECAUSE JUST RESEMBLING ME ISN'T ENOUGH FOR HIM TO BE CONSIDERED MY EQUAL.
WHEN HE MESSES UP, IT PROBABLY EATS HIM UP INSIDE TO ALWAYS BE LOOKING AT MY BACK.
BUT IF HE CAN JUST KEEP IT FROM EATING AT HIM...
...HE COULD VERY WELL MAKE IT TO PLACES I NEVER COULD, NO MATTER HOW HARD I STRUGGLED.

MADOKA, IF YOU EVER WITNESS HIM AT A CROSS-ROADS LIKE THAT...
...PLEASE HOLD OUT YOUR HAND TO HIM KINDLY...
.....

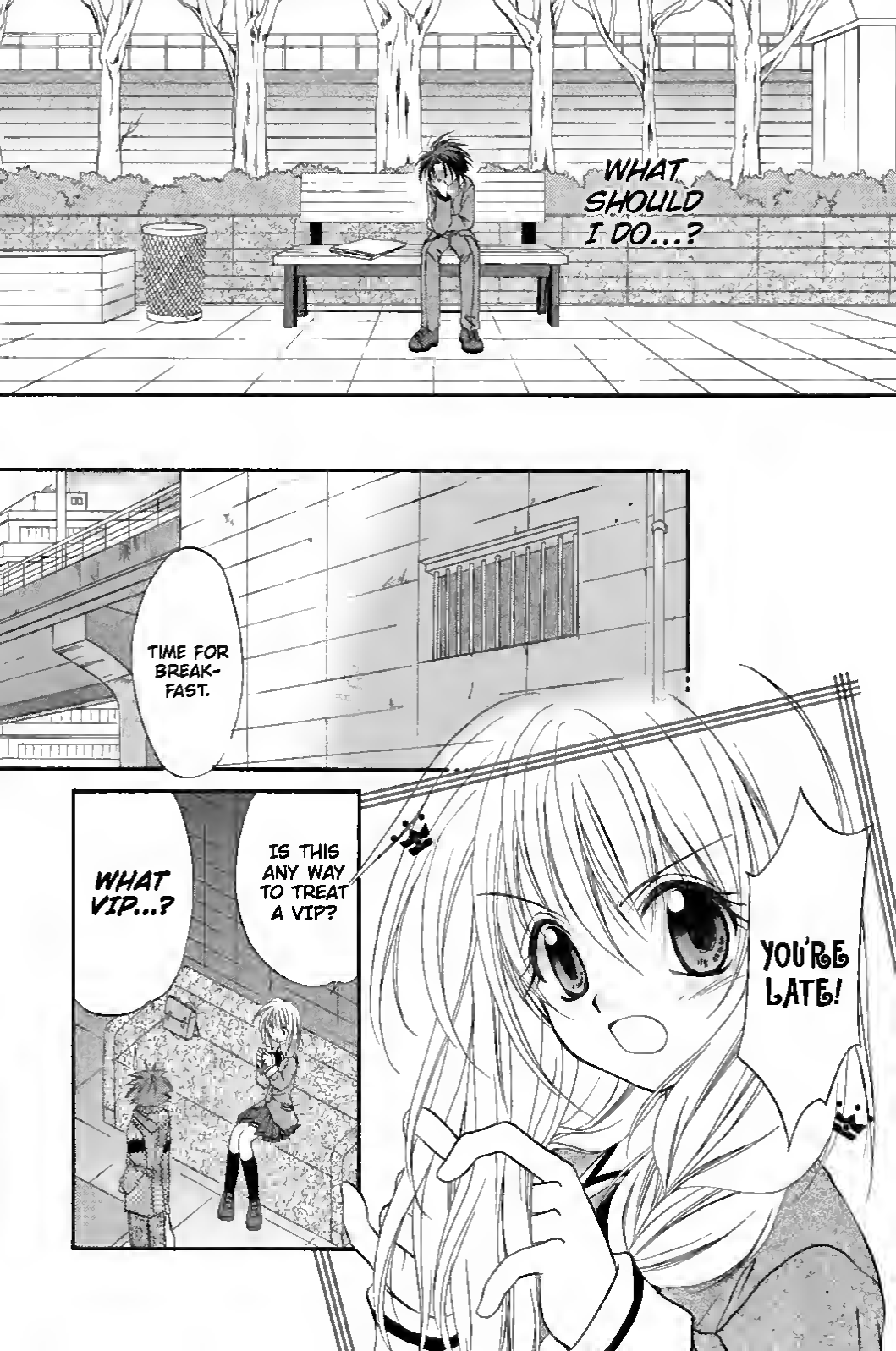
AS WITHIN THE HEART OF THE BOY...
...THE WORLD TOO GROWS DARK...
GII (CREAK)

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
A DAY FULL OF LOSERS

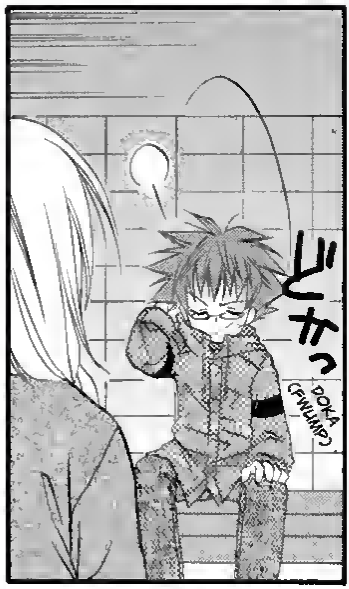



CHIRP
CHIRP
CHIRP

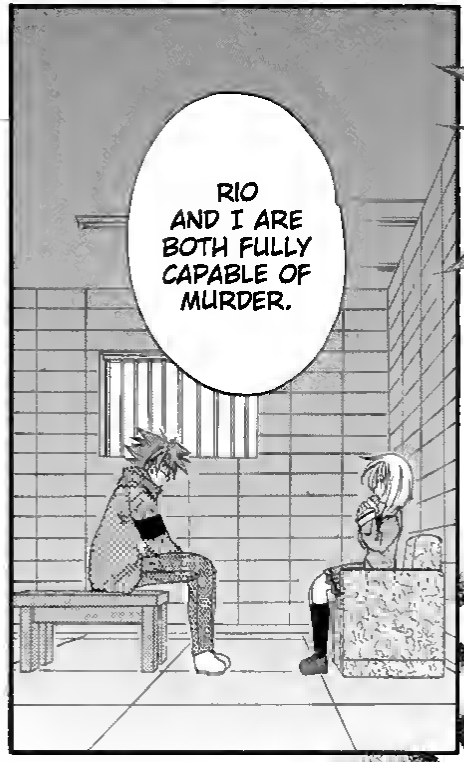
...SHIT...
BUT I'M SURPRISED I WASN'T ARRESTED FOR PULLING A STUNT LIKE THAT...
.....
しゅ
KUSHA (RUFFLE)


WHAT SHOULD I DO...?
TIME FOR BREAK-FAST.
WHAT VIP...?
IS THIS ANY WAY TO TREAT A VIP?
YOU'RE LATE!

HERE.
HYU (TOSS)
HASSHI (CATCH)
はっし!
GASA (RUSTLE)
AH!
BREAD AND MILK!
MORNING CALLS FOR EGGS, MISO SOUP, TOFU, AND DRIED SEAWEED!
HAVE YOU NO COMMON SENSE AT ALL!?
HMPH!
WHO'RE YOU CALLING AN IDIOT?
BI (RIP)
CAN AN IDIOT WHO WILLFULLY BECAME A HOSTAGE REALLY LECTURE ME ABOUT COMMON SENSE...?

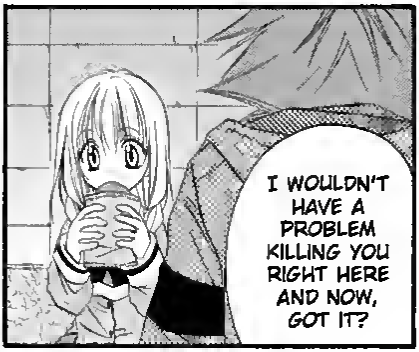

ドカッ
(DOKA (PWUNH?)

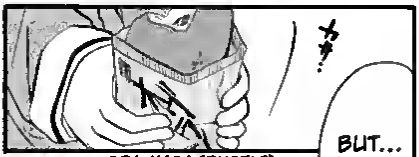
.....
IF I HADN'T BEEN SO KIND AS TO LET YOU CATCH ME, YOU'D BE AT A PRETTY BIG DISADVANTAGE, BELIEVE YOU ME!
IF ANYTHING, YOU SHOULD BE THANKING ME!


RIO AND I ARE BOTH FULLY CAPABLE OF MURDER.

LITTLE LADY, AREN'T YOU SCARED?

SURE, IF YOU DIED AND THAT TAPE WAS HANDED OVER TO THE POLICE...
...THE TWO OF US WOULDN'T GET OFF SO EASILY.
BUT WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF WAYS TO CONCEAL OURSELVES IF NEED BE.


I WOULDN'T HAVE A PROBLEM KILLING YOU RIGHT HERE AND NOW, GOT IT?


SFX: KASA (RUSTLE)
BUT...

...YOU WANT TO GET OFF SCOT-FREE IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, AM I RIGHT?
AFTER ALL, RIO'S STILL IN A DELICATE STATE FROM HER INJURIES.

AND YOU GUYS STILL...
...EXPECT SOMETHING FROM NARUMI-SAN.

LATELY, THE GIRLS IN MY LIFE REALLY ARE SOMETHING ELSE...
MAN, AND I THOUGHT RIO WAS GOOD... I GOTTA HAND IT TO THIS CHICK TOO.
MORE IMPORTANTLY...
.....
SO YOU CAN'T KILL ME NOW.
IN SHORT, I'M SAFE UNTIL HIS REMATCH WITH RIO-SAN IS OVER.
...HAVE YOU DISCOVERED NARUMI-SAN'S WHEREABOUTS YET?
WE HAVEN'T LOCATED HIM YET.
SORRY.
...HMM.
YOUR INFO NETWORK REALLY ISN'T TOO IMPRESSIVE THEN, IS IT?
TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PROCURE A SECURE LOCATION SO EASILY IS PROOF THAT YOU HAVE CONSIDERABLE FUNDS AT YOUR DISPOSAL.
IN FACT, I COULD READILY SURMISE THAT YOU'VE GOT AN ORGANIZATION'S BACKING TO HELP YOU.

BEING HERE, I'VE THOUGHT A LOT OF THINGS OVER.
IF YOU WANT TO LIVE A LONG LIFE, YOU'D BETTER SHUT UP NOW.
THOUGH YOU APPEAR TO HAVE A SHORTAGE OF PERSONNEL...
FOR EXAMPLE, I CAN'T IMAGINE THAT THE FIRST BLADE CHILDREN I MET WERE EVER IN CONTACT WITH YOU AND RIO-SAN.
MEANING THE "BLADE CHILDREN" ARE NOT NECESSARILY ONE UNIFIED ENTITY.

MOREOVER... PEOPLE WHO TRY TO MURDER CHILDREN AND PEOPLE WHO BECOME THE TARGET OF OTHERS' THREATS...
...AND PEOPLE LIKE SENSEI WHO KNEW TOO MUCH...
...CAUSE DIVISIONS TO FORM WITH THE HAVOC THEY CREATE.
AND THE ONE THING I SHOULD TAKE PARTICULAR NOTE OF IS...
...THAT YOU TWO AREN'T THE ONES LEADING THIS OPERATION AT ALL.
YOU TWO ARE ONLY PUT INTO ACTION WHEN A PROBLEM ARISES...
GAS (RUSTLE)
...AND YOU ALSO WORK TOGETHER WHEN SOMEONE'S TO BE KILLED.
THAT'S THE WORST KIND OF SOLUTION.
PUSH (POP)

IF YOU'RE IN ABSOLUTE CONTROL OF A SITUATION, YOU CAN DEAL WITH A PROBLEM BEFORE IT GROWS TOO BIG.
IF YOU HAVE TRUE POWER, YOU CAN SUPPRESS ANYTHING WITHOUT RESORTING TO MURDER.
BUT EVERY-THING'S MOVING OUTSIDE OF YOUR PURVIEW.
AND ALL POTENTIAL DANGER'S BEING DEALT WITH BEFORE IT EVEN REACHES YOU.
SOMEONE'S BEEN A BUSY BEAVER.
SO AREN'T YOU TWO REALLY...
...NOTHING MORE THAN SMALL BOATS BEING TOSSED AROUND IN A STORM?
NARUMI-SAN'S ALSO GETTING TOSSED AROUND BY THE SITUATION, BUT...
...AREN'T YOU AND RIO-SAN IN A REALLY BAD PLACE WHERE YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE?
PLUL CMUNCHD
.....

ASA-ZUKI-SAN.
YOU'RE BOTH TRYING YOUR BEST TO GET AWAY FROM THAT PLACE...
...AND FIGHTING FOR YOUR LIVES AGAINST SOME KIND OF FORCE.
AND TO WIN THAT FIGHT...
...NARUMI-SAN IS KEY, AM I RIGHT?
BUT IT'S NOT EVEN THE NARUMI-SAN WE KNOW NOW THAT YOU NEED...
...BUT, RATHER, A STRONGER AND MORE MATURE...
...AYUMU NARUMI.

I WOULDN'T PUT MYSELF THROUGH ALL THAT TROUBLE TO FIGHT AGAINST JUST ANY-THING.
AND I'M NOT THAT INVESTED IN THAT LOSER ANYWAY.
I DON'T CARE IF I'M NOT SAVED.
GACHA (KLATCH)

PAN (POP)
WHEN NOTHING GOES RIGHT, YOU HAVE TO FACE FORWARD AND TAKE IT ON HEAD-FIRST.
I KILL PEOPLE BECAUSE I WANT TO.
I'M NOT LOOKING FOR FOR-GIVENESS FROM ANYBODY FOR ANY-THING.
I BECAME A KILLER OF MY OWN FREE WILL.
IF YOU DON'T FIGHT...
...THEN HOW CAN YOU EVER ATTAIN HAPPI-NESS?

IT'S ALL JUST A WASTE OF TIME...
YOU'RE WASTING MY TIME...
BATAN (SLAM)
WHO'D EVER FIGHT A BATTLE WHERE DEFEAT WAS A GIVEN?
BUILDING: MIYASHITA GENERAL HOSPITAL
SIGN: RIO TAKEUCHI
510
竹内理緒
COME IN...
KON (KNOCK) KON
HRRM-MMM...
SFX: PURU (TREMBLE) PURU

GURARI (COLLAPSE)
ガチャッ
GACHA (KLATCH)
EYES-KUN!!
IF ANYONE WAS TO FIND OUT YOU HUNG OUT WITH ME, THEN...!
YOU'RE A CELEBRITY NOW!
YOU CAN'T COME HERE!

WHAT'D HE SAY!?
HE TOLD ME NOT ONLY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED WITH NARUMI JUNIOR...
AFTER I HEARD FROM ASAZUKI, I GOT WORRIED ABOUT YOU.
(GI (CREAK)
...BUT THAT YOU MIGHT BE DEPRESSED TOO.
BUT YOU LOST TO THAT HIYONO GIRL, DIDN'T YOU?
WHY WOULD I BE DEPRESSED?
I BROUGHT HIM TO HIS KNEES.
I DON'T CONSIDER IT A LOSS.

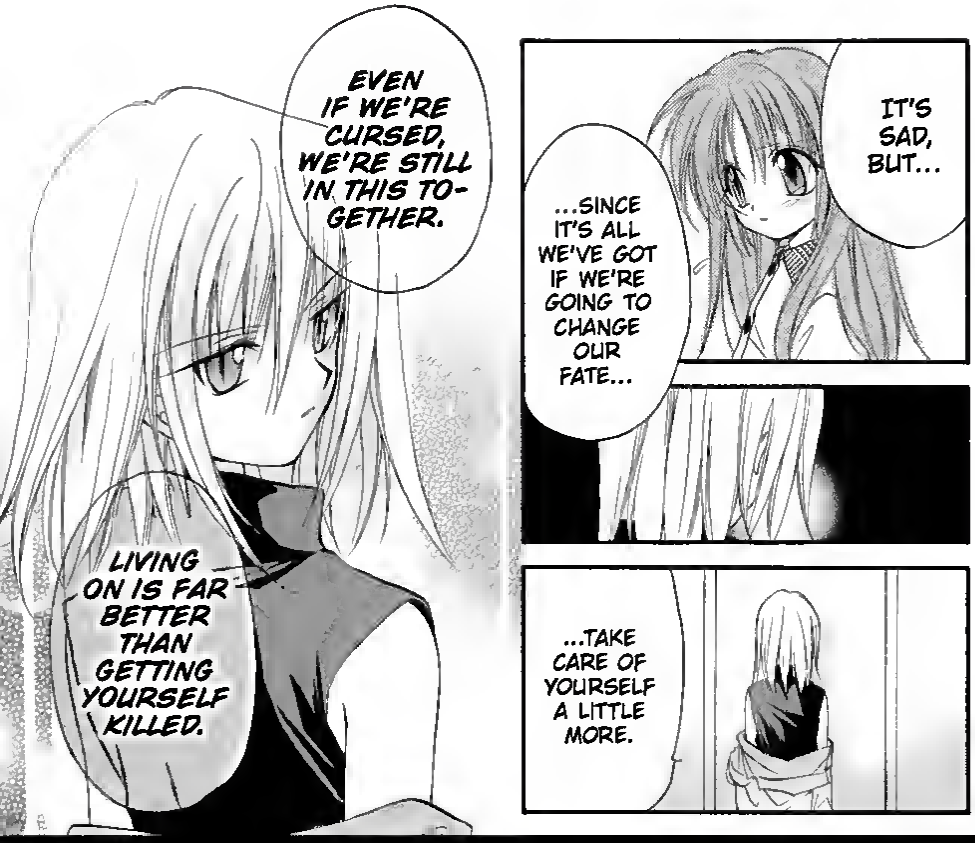
...IRRITATED.
...JUST A TINY BIT...
I'M JUST A LITTLE BIT...
BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT THIS IS REALLY ABOUT.
THAT TOO.
...IT DIDN'T GO AS YOU'D PLANNED, IS THAT IT?
BECAUSE IN THE VERY END...

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, WE MIGHT HAVE TO BELIEVE IN HIM JUST AS MUCH.
THAT KID BROTHER HAS TO BELIEVE IN HIMSELF.
THAT'S JUST WHAT KIYOTAKA SAYS.
AND HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BELIEVE IN A WEAK, BACKWARD-MINDED BOY LIKE HIM?
COME ON. THAT LITTLE BROTHER'S THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SAVE US, RIGHT?

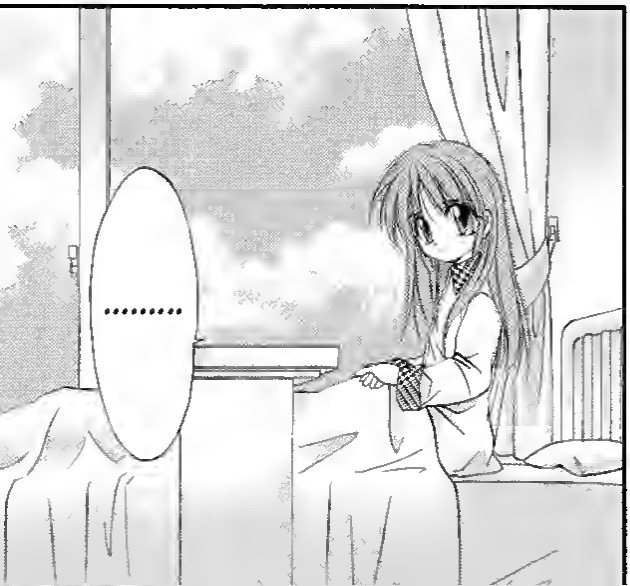
MAYBE FROM THE START THERE WAS NO HOPE FOR US.
WE WERE ALL...
...DOOMED FROM THE MOMENT WE WERE BORN.
ARE YOU AFRAID, EYES-KUN...
...OF BEING BETRAYED ...
...OR OF HAVING THE ONE THING YOU BELIEVE IN BROKEN ...?

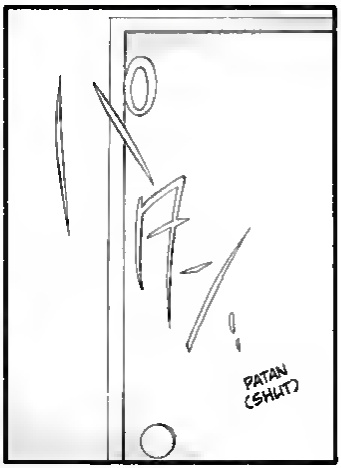
IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN...
...YOU'LL GET KNOCKED DOWN BY KIYOTAKA-SAMA AGAIN AND AGAIN...
...JUST LIKE HIS LITTLE BROTHER, WHO STOPPED BELIEVING TO SAVE HIMSELF ANY FURTHER PAIN.
BECAUSE HIS LITTLE BROTHER DIDN'T BELIEVE IN HIMSELF, HE FELL TO HIS KNEES.
AND BECAUSE HIYONO-SAN BELIEVED IN HIM, SHE GOT ONE STEP AHEAD OF ME.
IT REMINDED ME ALL OVER AGAIN...

...AND HOW IT'S ALWAYS ONLY THOSE WHO BELIEVE WHO CAN FIND HAPPINESS.
...OF JUST HOW LACKING MY INTELLIGENCE AND COURAGE ARE...
AND I'M NOT EVEN SURE OF WHAT KIND OF MATCH HE CAN HANDLE.
I DON'T KNOW IF HE'LL RECOVER FROM LAST TIME.
I DON'T KNOW...
ARE YOU GOING TO DUEL WITH NARUMI JUNIOR AGAIN?
THIS TIME, I'M GOING TO FIGHT HIM HEAD-TO-HEAD!
...IF HE FACES ME, I'LL TAKE HIM ON WITH ALL I'VE GOT!
BUT...
KYU (CLENCH)
きゅ


EVEN IF WE'RE CURSED, WE'RE STILL IN THIS TO-GETHER.
LIVING ON IS FAR BETTER THAN GETTING YOURSELF KILLED.
IT'S SAD, BUT...
...SINCE IT'S ALL WE'VE GOT IF WE'RE GOING TO CHANGE OUR FATE...
...TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF A LITTLE MORE.

EVEN IF A SOUL-SEARING TIME FOR ATONEMENT COMES.





EYES-KUN...
I'M GLAD HE CAME OUT HERE TO SEE ME BUT...
SIGH... はぁ
...WHOEVER HEARD OF VISITING SOMEONE EMPTY-HANDED?
HE COULD'VE AT LEAST BROUGHT ME A MELON.
UUUH...
THE NET-PATTERNED KIND...
THERE'S BEEN NO PROGRESS IN THE INVESTI-GATIONS INTO...
...THE STRING OF INCIDENTS REVOLVING AROUND TSUKIOMI HIGH.
THE MURDER OF THE ONE TEACHER... THE BOMBING...
THE MOTIVE BEHIND EACH INCIDENT HAS YET TO BE DEDUCED.
cafe SIMOU

...THE ONE THING THAT'S CERTAIN IS THAT YOUR LITTLE BROTHER WAS INVOLVED IN BOTH CASES IN SOME WAY, LIEUTENANT.
HOW-EVER...
AND WE'VE BEEN INVESTIGATING THE POSSIBLE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE TWO WITH ZERO LUCK. WE CAN'T FIND A SINGLE LINK.
...THERE MUST BE SOMETHING TO IT.
THE FORCE HASN'T YET EXPLORED THIS ISSUE IN PARTICULAR, BUT...
PERHAPS THERE'S A CHANCE TO GET CLOSER TO THE BLADE CHILDREN THROUGH HIM.

DON'T YOU SEE HOW IT COULD ALL BE CONNECTED TO YOUR LITTLE BROTH-
MY LITTLE BROTHER REALLY IS AMAZING.
SO FAR, ALL THE KIDS WE'VE PEGGED AS BLADE CHILDREN HAVE BEEN STUDENTS AT TSUKIOMI HIGH.
SINCE THE MIZUE NOHARA CASE AT THE BEGINNING, SEVERAL INCIDENTS HAVE OCCURRED AT THAT SCHOOL, WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?
HUH?
HE'S SO MUCH LIKE KIYOTAKA-SAN...
"IT PROBABLY EATS HIM UP INSIDE TO ALWAYS BE LOOKING AT MY BACK."
"I'M NOT LIKE MY BROTHER."
HE'S SO AMAZING IT MAKES ME A LITTLE JEALOUS.
...MAYBE HE'S A VARIETY OF GENIUS HIMSELF.

I WONDER IF THE KID'S DONE WHAT HE ALWAYS DOES AND GIVEN HIMSELF A COMPLEX OVER KIYOTAKA-SAN...
EVEN WITH HIS EXCESSIVE GENIUS, PERHAPS HE'S LET HIMSELF SUCCUMB TO THE FEAR OF BEING CRUSHED.
.....!
GATA (CLATTER)
ガタッ

WATAYA!!
DA (DASH)
!

CATCH HIM!
GATA (CLATTER)
...I SWEAR...
IF YOU ACTUALLY LET YOURSELF GET CAPTURED BY WATAYA...
...SOMETHING'S DEFINITELY UP WITH YOU.
AH!
LEMME GO!
SHUT UP.
AND BESIDES, I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING TO DESERVE GETTING CAPTURED.
FUI (TURN)

WATAYA.
YES?
GIVE US A MINUTE, WOULD YOU?
HNNH
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO STARTED TO RUN.
SUGO (TRUDGE)
SUGO
.....
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME...
...I'VE SEEN YOU MAKE THAT FACE.
EVEN THOUGH I'M ALWAYS THE ONE MOPING AROUND AND HANGING MY HEAD.
I'M NOT MOPING.

...HATE RESEMBLING KIYOTAKA-SAN THAT MUCH?
.....
DO YOU...
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
I TOLD YOU, I'M NOTHING LIKE MY BROTHER.
ONLY RESEMBLING HIM...
...BUT NEVER OUTDOING HIM... IS THAT PAINFUL FOR YOU?

.....!
I DON'T CARE ABOUT THAT!
I...

IF YOU DIDN'T CARE, YOU WOULDN'T GET SO EMOTIONAL ABOUT IT.
AND WHEN YOU'RE TALKING TO SOMEONE, YOU SHOULD LOOK THEM IN THE EYE.
It's okay to not match up to him.
It doesn't mean your life's over just because of that.
SHE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND...
I HAD EVERYTHING STOLEN FROM ME BY MY BROTHER.
UNLESS I WIN, I'LL NEVER GET IT BACK.

UNLESS I WIN, MY LIFE WILL...
LIS-TEN...
SU (REACH)
...EVEN IF YOU LOSE, MAKE A MESS OF YOURSELF, AND LOOK COMPLETELY LAME...
PON (HUG)
...THERE'LL ALWAYS BE SOMEBODY WHO'LL LOVE YOU AND STAY BY YOUR SIDE.

IT MAY NOT BE MUCH, BUT I LOVE YOU AND I'LL BE HERE FOR YOU.
SO THERE'S NO NEED FOR YOU TO SUFFER ON YOUR OWN.
JUST BECAUSE YOU LOSE SOMETIMES DOESN'T MEAN YOU'LL LOSE IT ALL.

YOU DON'T GET IT, SIS.
GU! (PULL)
.....!
I CAN'T PROTECT WHAT'S IMPOR-TANT TO ME!!
WHEN I LOSE, I LOSE IT ALL!
...YOU CAN'T GO GETTING DOWN ON YOURSELF.
IF YOU'RE GOING TO THINK THAT WAY...

IT'S OKAY TO CRY AND RUN AWAY SOMETIMES.
KUSHA (RUFFLE)
IF YOU KEEP THIS UP, YOU'LL NEVER WIN, EVEN WHEN YOU DO.
AND BE-SIDES ...
.....!
...WHETHER YOU WIN OR LOSE, IF I DON'T HAVE YOU, I CAN'T FUNCTION.
THE COOKING AND LAUNDRY AT HOME ARE ALL UP TO YOU.
SFX. KURU (TURN)
TA (DASH)

I WONDER IF KIYOTAKA-SAN SAW THIS DAY COMING...
KIYOTAKA-SAN...
...WAS THIS THE RIGHT WAY TO GO?
SHALL I GO AFTER HIM?
I THINK HE'LL BE FINE FOR NOW.
NOSORI (PEER)
ORRR
...HE COULD SEE THINGS TO THE VERY END BEFORE THEY HAPPENED.
AFTER ALL, HE ALWAYS WAS GODLIKE IN THAT...
BURORORORO (VROOOOM)
...EVERYTHING WILL GO ACCORDING TO KIYOTAKA'S CALCULATIONS... OR WAS THIS WHAT HE WAS AFTER?
IF NARUMI JUNIOR CAN REALLY PULL HIMSELF TOGETHER FOR A COMEBACK THIS TIME AROUND...

Kenote
HOW FAR AHEAD HAS HE STRATEGIZED?
JUST HOW FAR AHEAD HAS HE PREDICTED ALREADY?
板明塾
MMC
THINK! THINK OF SOME-THING!
THAT'S RIGHT. WHAT AM I DOING GETTING DOWN?
I HAVE TO SAVE HER.
...I'M SUCH AN IDIOT.
EVEN IF IT'S NO USE, I HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO WIN!!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
FLASH OF LIGHTNING AT FIVE O'CLOCK
PO (PLIP)
PO
AND IT WAS SO CLEAR BEFORE TOO.
PO
IT'S RAINING?
PO
PO

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
FLASH OF LIGHTNING AT FIVE O'CLOCK

UUUUH...
I DON'T LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT...
KACHA (CLINK)
カチャ
THEY WERE SAYING THERE'D BE THUNDER-STORMS DEPENDING ON THE REGION.
KACHA
カチャ
ZAAAA (SSSSHHH)
ザァァァ
I HATE THUNDER.
IS IT JUST MY IMAGINATION...?
I'M GETTING THE FEELING THAT SOME-THING WE COULD REALLY DO WITHOUT IS GONNA HAPPEN ...
UUUGH, THAT DOES IT!
KOU-SUKE-KUN!
!?

はぁ
LE SIGH.
BUT COME ON...
IT'S STRESS-ING ME OUT.
WHY COULDN'T YOU GET ME SOMETHING MORE DIGITAL TO WORK WITH?
LIKE A GAMEBOY OR SOMETHING..
I CAN'T UNDO THIS PUZZLE RING FOR THE LIFE OF ME!
WELL, IF YOU COULD UNDO IT EASILY, THERE WOULDN'T BE MUCH POINT TO IT, NOW WOULD AND THERE?
AFTER I WENT OUTTA MY WAY TO GET IT FOR YOU WHEN YOU ASKED FOR SOME-THING TO KILL THE TIME.
CHEAP-SKATE!
KACHA (CLINK)
DON'T BE AN IDIOT!
IF YOU WANTED SOMETHING THAT EXPEN-SIVE, YOU SHOULD'VE ASKED RUTHER-FORD. HE'S SWIMMING IN MONEY!
UUUUH!
BOX: PUZZLE RING
.....
HMMM
KACHA KACHA

...SHE REALLY IS JUST A LITTLE GIRL...
SEEING HER LIKE THIS...
カチャカチャ
KACHA KACHA
KA (FLASH)
ガリガリオォォン
GARIGARI (RRRUMBLE)
DOOOON (BOOOOM)
ひゃあああ
HYAAAAH!!
ポイ
POI (TOSS)
ガバ
GABA (HIDE)

ZAAAA
(SSSSHHHH)
KASHIN
(CLINK)
IT'S JUST THUNDER. DON'T GET SO SCARED...
UUH! UUH!
...RIO.
CHARI
(TINKLE)
BUT ...!

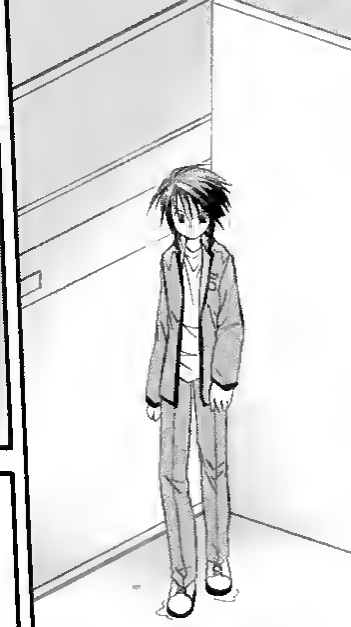
GABA (RISE)
がば
!
YOU GUYS HAVE A TOWEL I COULD USE?
POTA (DRIP)
WHA ...!?
NARUMI JUNIOR!!
I GOT CAUGHT IN THE SUDDEN DOWNPOUR.

YOU'RE ONLY SUPPOSED TO GO INTO A GIRL'S ROOM AFTER KNOCKING.

YOU MUST NOT HAVE HEARD ME WITH THE THUNDER.
BATAN (SHUT)

...DRENCHED LOSER-SAN?
PI (SPRAY) PI

...WELL?
WHAT DO YOU WANT HERE...

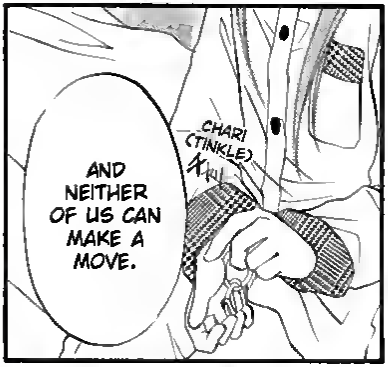


EVEN A LOSER'S GOT SPIRIT.
SHH (WOOSH)
HEH
POSLIN (POOMF)
LET'S MAKE A DEAL.

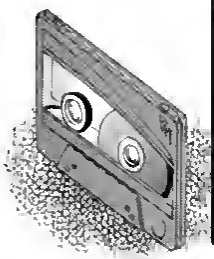
AFTER ALL, WE'RE BOTH...
...IN POSSESSION OF SOMETHING DANGEROUS.

GOSHI (RUB)
IF HIYONO YUIZAKI GETS KILLED...
...I WON'T HESITATE TO TURN THAT TAPE IN TO THE POLICE.
ZAAAAAA (SSSHHHHH)
IF...
THOUGH YOU GUYS HAVE THE PREPARATIONS NEEDED TO MAKE A GET-AWAY...
...YOUR MOVES FROM HERE ON OUT ARE CONSIDERABLY LIMITED.
NOT TO MENTION ...
I'M SURE YOU WANT TO AVOID POLICE INVOLVEMENT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.
SO YOU CAN'T KILL HER.
...YOU'RE STILL SERIOUSLY INJURED.

IN OTHER WORDS, OUR WEAK POINTS ARE IN EACH OTHER'S HANDS.


AND NEITHER OF US CAN MAKE A MOVE.
CHARI (TINKLE)

BECAUSE ONCE THAT TAPE GOES TO THE POLICE, THERE'S NO REASON TO KEEP HER ALIVE.



BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, AS LONG AS SHE LIVES, I CAN'T LOOK TO THE POLICE FOR HELP.
IF I DID, YOU'D BE SURE TO KILL HER.

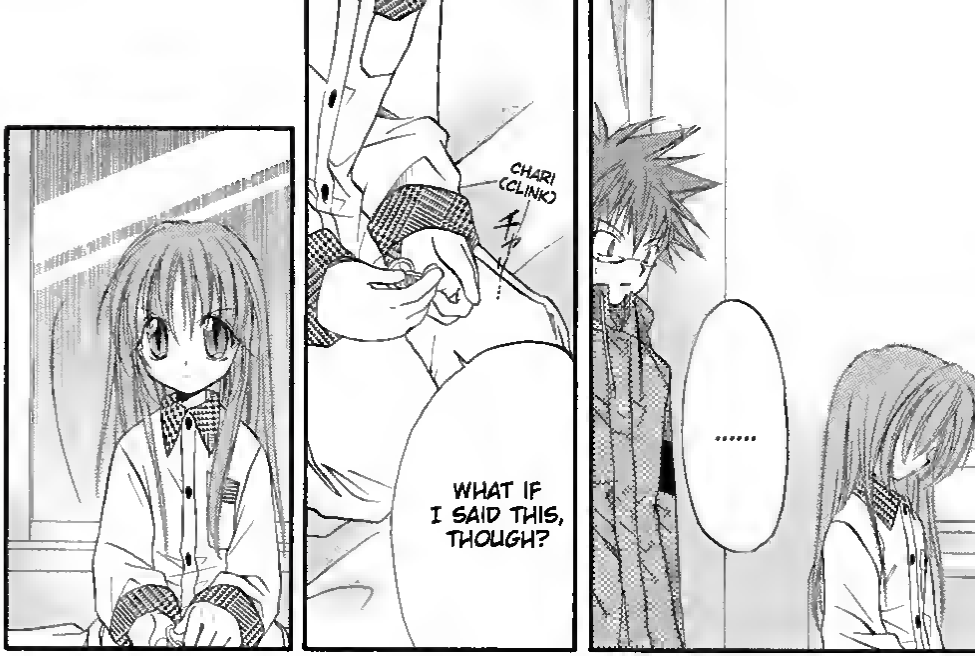
YOU THINK WE'D GO FOR TERMS LIKE THAT?
FOR ALL I KNOW, YOU COULD'VE MADE DUPLICATES OF THE TAPE.

EVEN AFTER A THOUSAND DAYS, THIS WOULDN'T CHANGE.
SO YOU'RE SUGGESTING WE TRADE THE GIRL FOR THE TAPE?

AFTER YOU GOT THE LITTLE LADY IN YOUR HANDS AGAIN, YOU COULD HAND IT OVER TO THE POLICE, AND THAT'D BE THE END OF US.
I HAVEN'T MADE ANY COPIES OF IT.
HA!
YOUR PROMISE IS AS WORTH-LESS AS A SCRAP OF PAPER.
SAME GOES FOR YOU.
I'VE ONLY JUST MANAGED TO SLIP THROUGH ALL THE DANGER YOUR PROMISES HAVE GOTTEN ME.
ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME YOU BELIEVED IN ME?

SO HOW'S THIS SOUND?
EVEN IF I WAS TO GET HER OUT OF HERE SAFELY...
HYU (WHIP)
BAFU (POOMF)
...THERE'S STILL THE CHANCE THAT YOU WOULD COME AFTER HER AGAIN LATER.
I HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO PROTECT HER SAFETY FOR A LONG TIME.
AND SO THAT'S WHAT THIS DEAL'S GOING TO BE ABOUT.

ZAAAA
(SSSHHHH)
JUST YESTERDAY HE GOT KNOCKED DOWN SO EASILY.
SO HOW CAN HE PUT ON THAT FACE NOW?
IT'S LIKE ...
IT'S LIKE...
...THAT BASTARD KIYOTAKA HIMSELF!


CHARI (CLINK)
WHAT IF I SAID THIS, THOUGH?
.....

IF YOU DON'T TURN OVER THE TAPE IN ONE HOUR, WE'LL CHOP OFF ONE OF HIYONO-SAN'S FINGERS.
AND FOR EVERY THIRTY MINUTES THAT YOU'RE LATE WITH IT, WE'LL CUT OFF ANOTHER.

YOU THINK WE CAN HAVE OURSELVES A FAIR TRADE THEN?

IF YOU'RE REALLY GOING TO DO THAT, ALL I CAN DO IS OBEDIENTLY HAND IT OVER TO YOU THEN.
BUT YOU WON'T DO IT.
.....

.....
BECAUSE YOU'RE...
...NOT THE KIND OF GIRL WHO'D BE SATISFIED WITH MAKING ME SURRENDER WITH VIOLENCE LIKE THAT.
THANKS TO HER.
I LOST TO YOU YESTERDAY.
BUT YOU SURE DON'T ACT LIKE YOU'VE WON AT ALL.
I'M NOT PROPOSING A SIMPLE TRADE-OFF HERE.
I'M SAYING WE SETTLE THE SCORE FROM YESTERDAY.

KA
(FLASH)
...WANT TO KILL ME, DON'T YOU?
YOU DO...
GORORO
(RRRRUMBLE)
DOOOON
(BOOOOM)
GARIGARI
(RRRUMBLE)
WILL YOU LET ME KILL YOU?

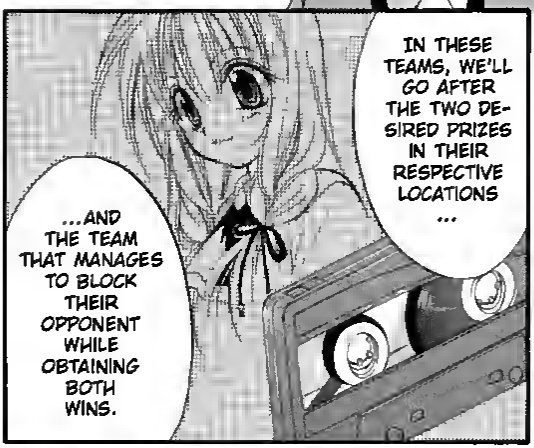
THE THUNDER TODAY'S BEEN AWE-SOME...
HAAAH ...
COME ON, NARUMI-SAN.
IF YOU'RE TOO LATE TO THE RESCUE...
...THE IMPRISONED PRINCESS WILL JUST HAVE TO ESCAPE ON HER OWN!

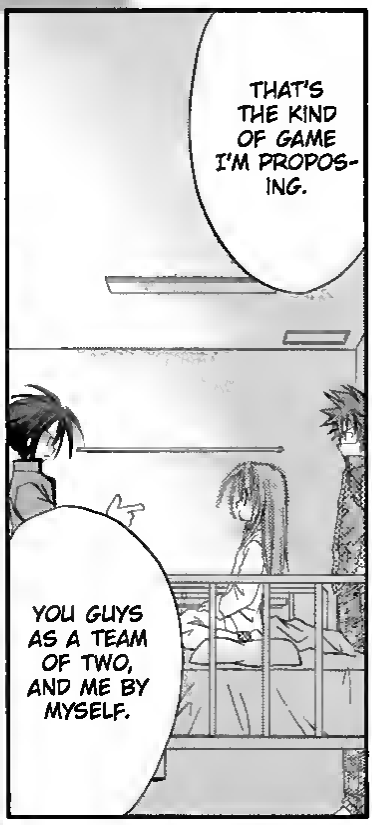
"WHEN IT COMES TO AYUMU, IF YOU, WITH ANGELIC FAIRNESS, PRESENT HIM WITH A CHANCE TO BATTLE AND WIN...
...I GIVE YOU PERMISSION TO PULL A STUNT OF DEMONIC SLYNESS AND KILL HIM."
SO AS LONG AS WE PRESENT THE SAME OPPORTUNITY TO EACH OTHER, TRICKS AND LIES ARE OKAY, EH?
THEN IT'S NO WONDER YOUR METHODS TREAT THIS ALL LIKE A GAME.
THOSE WERE KIYOTAKA'S CONDITIONS.
SO IF I FOLLOW WHAT HE SAID, I CAN KILL YOU.
LITTLE BROTHER...
...JUST WHAT KIND OF DEAL ARE YOU SUGGESTING WE MAKE?

WE EACH HAVE IN OUR POSSESSION WHAT THE OTHER WANTS.
A TAPE AND A HOSTAGE.
THAT'S CORRECT.
AND WHOEVER GETS BOTH OF THEM WINS.
THAT'S WHERE THE DEAL LIES.
RIGHT NOW, THE TAPE IS SOMEWHERE WHERE EVEN I CAN'T RETRIEVE IT UNTIL AFTER 2 P.M. TOMORROW.
AND...
...IF DURING ALL THIS, THE UNLIKELY SHOULD HAPPEN ...
...THERE'S NO DOUBT YOU'LL BE HANDED OVER TO THE POLICE.
NI (GRIN)
NOT TO SAY I'VE FOOLISHLY PUT MYSELF IN DANGER, BUT...
...IF YOU FIGURE OUT THE HIDING PLACE AND GET THERE BEFORE I DO...
...YOU CAN STEAL THE TAPE FROM ME, GOT IT?

.....
...AND THEN?
YOU SHOULD GIVE ME AN EQUAL CHANCE.
TOMORROW AFTERNOON AT 1 P.M., I'LL TELL YOU WHERE I'M HIDING THE TAPE.
AT THE EXACT SAME TIME, YOU TELL ME WHERE YOU'RE KEEPING HER.
AND THEN WE GO AND GET OUR RESPECTIVE ITEMS... IS THAT IT?
SO IT REALLY IS JUST A SIMPLE TRADE AFTER ALL.
YOU'RE WRONG.
WE EACH KNOW WHERE THE OTHER WANTS TO GO.
SO DOESN'T IT STAND TO REASON THAT WE COULD GET IN EACH OTHER'S WAY?

GORORO
(RRRUMBLE)
"no"
AND NATURALLY...
...THAT OFFERS THE CHANCE FOR ONE OF US TO ACTUALLY GET BOTH ITEMS.


IN THESE TEAMS, WE'LL GO AFTER THE TWO DESIRED PRIZES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE LOCATIONS ...
...AND THE TEAM THAT MANAGES TO BLOCK THEIR OPPONENT WHILE OBTAINING BOTH WINS.


THAT'S THE KIND OF GAME I'M PROPOSING.
YOU GUYS AS A TEAM OF TWO, AND ME BY MYSELF.

...WELL?

LET'S MAKE THIS A GAME WHERE SHE CAN BE KILLED EITHER FAIRLY OR ON THE SLY.
THAT'S THE DEAL.
FINE, YOU DECIDE THE DETAILS.
WE NEED A FEW MORE RULES AND SOME GROUND-WORK.
SO WHY?
BUT LEAVING ALL OTHER CONDITIONS TO US WILL ONLY BE DISADVAN-TAGEOUS TO HIM IN EVERY WAY.
IT'S TRUE THAT DOING IT THIS WAY WILL MAKE IT A MATCH OF WITS AND COURAGE.
IS THIS A CHAL-LENGE ...
HYO! (YOINK)
CHARI (CLINK)
HOW CAN HE BE SO BRAVE ABOUT THIS?

!
OR...
...YOU'LL ACCEPT?
...WILL YOU RUN AWAY?
CHAR! (CLINK)
POTO (PLOP)
POTO

IF YOU CAN STICK TO MY BROTHER'S RESTRIC-TIONS...
...THE CONDITIONS YOU SET MAKE NO DIFFERENCE TO ME.
...FINE.
DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER CONDI-TIONS?
WE'LL MAKE YOU PAY...
...FOR THAT CAREFREE ATTITUDE.

JUST TRY IT.
KURU (TURN)

ZAAAAAA
(SSSSHHH)
PATAN
(SHUT)
THAT ASS-HOLE...
THERE'S A LIMIT TO HOW MUCH YOU CAN BOUNCE BACK LIKE THAT...
BAFU
(POOMF)

POSA (FWUMP)
H-HEY, RIO...
HE GOT ME!
EVERY-THING WENT JUST AS HIYONO-SAN SAID!!
AAH?
DON'T YOU GET IT!?
SO FAR ALL THE BATTLES THAT LITTLE BROTHER'S FOUGHT HAVE BEEN OUT OF PRIDE, OR TO FIND KIYOTAKA-SAMA, OR ANY OTHER THING HE COULD CARE LESS ABOUT!
SO HE ALWAYS HAD DOUBT.
HE WAS WEAK IN HIS RESOLU-TION!

WHEN IT COMES TO SAVING SOMEONE'S LIFE, HE WON'T IDLE ABOUT IN INDECISION!
AND HE'S GOT KIYOTAKA-SAMA'S BLOOD RUNNING THROUGH HIS VEINS!
BUT NOW HE'S GOT THE IMPETUS OF HAVING TO SAVE HIYONO-SAN!
...LET ALONE...
BUT IF IT'S FOR ANOTHER...
...FOR A GIRL WHO'S CLOSE TO HIM, THEN...
BECAUSE HE DOESN'T LOVE HIMSELF...
...HE DOESN'T HAVE ANY CONFIDENCE. SO HE BARELY HAS THE URGE TO FIGHT FOR HIS OWN SAKE.
THE LITTLE BROTHER WE SAW JUST NOW WAS NO HOLDS BARRED.
SO MUCH SO THAT EVEN IF IT MEANS GETTING HIM-SELF KILLED, HE'S GOING TO SAVE HIYONO-SAN!

SHE KNEW.
GETTING MYSELF TAKEN HOSTAGE IS THE WAY TO SPUR ON NARUMI-SAN'S FIGHTING SPIRIT. SEE?
GYU (CLENCH)
SHE GOT HERSELF CAPTURED, KNOWING IT'D RELEASE THAT LITTLE BROTHER'S POWER TO THE MAX!
IN EVERY WAY...
...WE'VE BEEN HAD BY HER!!

MY LIFE JUST GOT SHORTENED A THOUSAND YEARS...
PHEW...
MY...
BUT ...
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS ...
I'M SO LAME COMPARED TO MY BROTHER...
ONE BLUFF AND MY HEART FEELS LIKE IT'S GONNA EXPLODE...
DO DO (THADUMP THADUMP)
EVEN IF THE WORST HAPPENS, I'LL BE ABLE TO SECURE HIYONO'S SAFETY.
I MANAGED TO PULL THAT LITTLE GIRL INTO THE GAME!
...MY READING OF HER WAS NEAR PERFECT.

...WHAT I'VE DONE NOW IS ENOUGH TO RILE HER UP TO WANT TO COME AT ME HEAD-ON TO KILL ME.
JUDGING BY THAT GIRL'S CHARACTER...
BUT, THIS WAY, AT LEAST SHE'LL BE SAFE.
PAN (SLAP)
FOCUS!
THE REAL SHOW STARTS NOW.

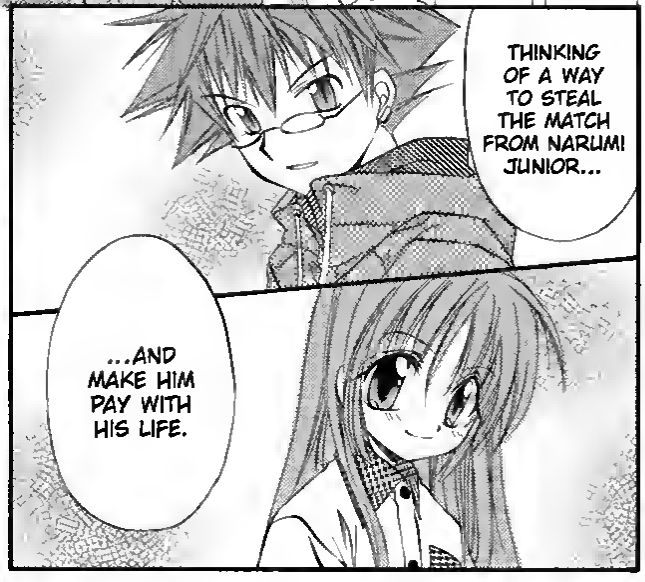
PON (PAT)
YOU'LL OPEN UP YOUR WOUNDS.
COME ON, CALM DOWN.
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND HOW SCARY THAT LITTLE BROTHER WILL BE NOW THAT HE'S GONE FULL THROTTLE!?
OH
KI (GLARE)
BESHI (SLAP)
HAUUH!
AS IF!

WHETHER IT'S THAT HE'S GOING FULL THROTTLE OR JUST RUNNING ON NERVOUS ENERGY...
...IT'S KIYOTAKA'S DOING.
O-OW... KOUSUKE-KUN.
LISTEN.
THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU CAN'T WIN!
YOU'RE NOT ACTING LIKE YOURSELF!
DON'T BE AFRAID OF SOMETHING THIS SMALL!
.....

KA (FLASH)
OKAY!
THIS TIME FOR SURE...

I'M SORRY.
Y-YEAH.
YOU'RE RIGHT.

GISHI (CREAK)
SO LET'S START THINKING.

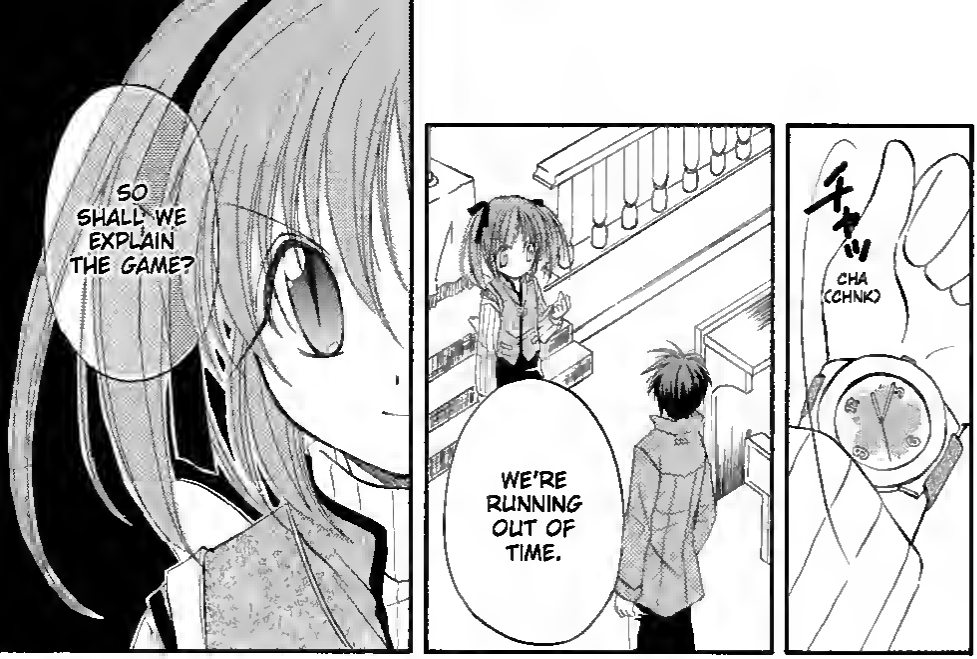

THINKING OF A WAY TO STEAL THE MATCH FROM NARUMI JUNIOR...
...AND MAKE HIM PAY WITH HIS LIFE.

...I'M GONNA MAKE HIM REGRET THAT SPIRIT OF HIS!
GOGO (RRRRRUMBLE)
ゴロゴロ…
: DON (BOOM)
IT'S THUNDER-ING...
ザアアアア…
ZAAAA (SSSHHH)
...AS THOUGH, SOME-WHERE OUT THERE, KIYOTAKA NARUMI IS LAUGHING.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
COLD EQUATION

YOU PRAYING TO GOD?
ZA (SCUFF)
.....
GOD...
...WON'T HEAL ME.

IF YOU WERE ABLE TO CALL ME OUT TO THIS PLACE...
.....
...THEN IT'S OKAY FOR YOU TO BE WALKING AROUND?
BUT...
NO, IT'S NOT.
BUT THIS IS NO TIME FOR ME TO BE LYING IN BED.
I'M SUPPOSED TO REST FOR TWO WEEKS.


SO SHALL WE EXPLAIN THE GAME?
WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME.
カチ
CHA (CHNK)

IT GOES LIKE THIS...
THE TAPE AND YOU, LITTLE LADY, ARE IN SEPARATE PLACES SOMEWHERE IN THE CITY.
AND WE'LL SEE WHO CAN GAIN CONTROL OF BOTH OF THEM.

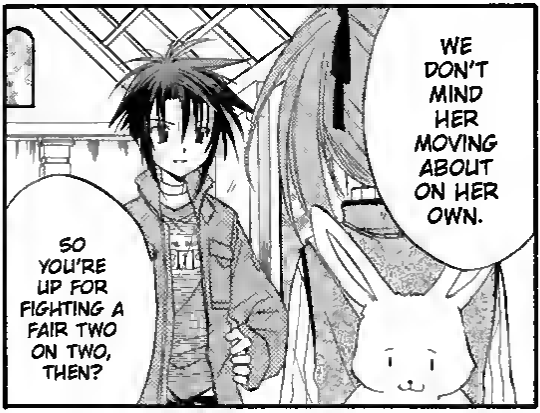
OF COURSE, THERE ARE OBSTACLES TO OVER-COME...
...THOUGH THEY'RE NOTHING DIFFICULT.
SO.
I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU THIS.
ぽい
POI (TOSS)
WHAT'S THIS?
IT'S THE KEY THAT'LL STOP THE TIMER TO A BOMB THAT'S BEEN PLANTED SOME-WHERE.
AND, OF COURSE, IF IT ISN'T STOPPED BEFORE THE TIME LIMIT'S UP, IT'LL GO BOOM.
WHERE'S "SOME-WHERE"?

AROUND NARUMI JUNIOR'S NECK...
NI (GRIND)
.....
IT MAY BE SMALL, BUT IT PACKS ENOUGH TO COMPLETELY OBLITERATE YOUR HEAD, LEAVING NARY A TRACE.
PI (BEEP)
YOU CAN'T TAKE OFF THE COLLAR WITHOUT USING THE DEFUSING KEY.
AND IF YOU TRY TO TAKE IT OFF BY FORCE, IT'LL BLOW UP IMMEDIATELY.
GOING BY MY WATCH, DETONATION WILL OCCUR AT 2:30 P.M.
PLEASE SYNCHRONIZE YOUR WATCH TO MINE.

WE'VE HANDED THE DEFUSING KEY OVER TO HIYONO-SAN.
IF YOU MANAGE TO MEET UP WITH HER WITHIN THE TIME LIMIT, YOU'LL BE SAVED.

BUT...
...IF DURING THE GAME YOU GET THE POLICE INVOLVED OR ASK FOR ANYBODY ELSE'S HELP...
...I'LL DETONATE THE COLLAR WITH THE TRIGGER I HAVE IN MY POSSESSION.
ALSO ...

...AT THE SAME TIME WE BEGIN THE GAME, AT 1:30 P.M...
...WE WILL RELEASE HIYONO-SAN.


WE DON'T MIND HER MOVING ABOUT ON HER OWN.
SO YOU'RE UP FOR FIGHTING A FAIR TWO ON TWO, THEN?

KUSU (GIGGLE)
FOR THE FIRST TEN MINUTES FOLLOWING HER RELEASE, WE WON'T MAKE ANY MOVES ON HER. BUT...

...WE WILL MOVE TO STRIP HER OF HER FREEDOM AFTER THAT TIME IS UP.
ALSO, ONCE WE GET AHOLD OF THE TAPE...
...WE PLAN ON KILLING HER WITHOUT HESITATION.
WELL, SINCE I SAID IT'S OKAY TO INTERFERE WITH YOUR OPPONENT'S PROGRESS TO THEIR GOAL...
...THAT'S ONLY NATURAL.
GOSO (RUMMAGE)
SU (SHOW)

ALL FOUR OF OUR NUMBERS ARE ENTERED IN THE ADDRESS BOOK.
SO YOU CAN CONTACT YOUR OPPONENT TOO.
SFX: HYOI (PEER)
ひょい
PLEASE ASK HER FOR HER LOCATION USING THAT.
BOTH HIYONO-SAN AND WE ARE CARRYING CELL PHONES.
THOUGH IT'S UP TO YOUR OPPONENT TO PICK UP.
PI (BEEP) PI
G-PHONE
SCREEN: HIYONO YUIZAKI
.....
WITHOUT CELL PHONES, WE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SET UP STRATEGIES OR TACTICS.
THIS BATTLE IS TAKING PLACE OVER A BROAD AREA, AFTER ALL.
HOW VERY KIND.

IF I'M GOING TO GO AFTER THE TAPE...
...AND TRY TO MEET UP WITH HER AT THE SAME TIME...
...THEN I'D HAVE TO DO THAT SOMEWHERE NEAR WHERE THE TAPE IS.
BUT THAT'D MEAN THAT NATURALLY THOSE TWO WOULD ALSO BE NEAR...
...IN-CREASING MY RISK OF BEING ATTACKED...
...BUT IF I MEET HER SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY, I WON'T MAKE IT IN TIME FOR THE TAPE.
AND IF I TRY TO SHAKE OFF THE ENEMY AND MEET WITH HER AFTER GETTING BACK THE TAPE...
...I MIGHT NOT HAVE ENOUGH TIME...

EITHER WAY, I'M WALKING A THIN LINE HERE...
SORRY, THIS IS RIGHT OFF THE BAT, BUT...
...IS IT OKAY FOR ME TO CHECK IF SHE'S DOING ALL RIGHT?
...GO AHEAD.
PI (BEEP)
LOG ON
ルルルルルルルル...
SFX-L: RURURURURU RURURU (RRRRRRING RRRRRRING)

NARUMI-SAN!?
PU (CLICK)
YO.
I'M GOING TO SAVE YOU, STUPID GIRL.
TSUUU (BEEEP)
TSUUUU
TSUUUU
THAT'S IT!?
NO "ARE YOU HURT?" OR "I HOPE THEY DIDN'T PUT YOU THROUGH TOO M-"
PU (CLICK)
I'll call you right back.
See ya.
EH!?
WAI-!

HYOOOI (DODGE)
AND I THINK YOUR PERSON-ALITY'S PRETTY MEAN TOO, LITTLE LADY.
THAT WAS SO MEAN JUST NOW!!
...WELL?
WHERE'S THE TAPE WE'RE AFTER?

I SEALED THE TAPE SECURELY AND MAILED IT OFF...
SU (SHOO)
...TO MY HOUSE.
...
EH?
AT A POST OFFICE.
GOSO (RUMMAGE)
!
IT'LL BE DELIVERED AROUND 2 P.M. TODAY.
SO EVEN IF YOU ARRIVE TO GET THE MAIL BEFORE ME...
HYU (TOSS)
...UNLESS IT'S DELIVERED, YOU CAN'T STEAL IT.
PASHI (CATCH)

I LIVE IN AN APART-MENT BUILDING.
NEXT TO THE MANAGEMENT OFFICE, THERE ARE MAILBOXES FOR EVERY APARTMENT.
AND THAT'S THE KEY TO THE RIGHT MAIL-BOX.
TO PREVENT BREAKING IN AND TO GUARANTEE PRIVACY, IT'S BEEN LOCKED.
.....!
...YOU THOUGHT THIS THROUGH, DIDN'T YOU?
YOU COULDN'T SEE THIS COMING?
I GAVE YOU A HINT ALREADY.
IF I DIE AND YOU GUYS FAIL TO RETRIEVE THE TAPE...
...MY SISTER WILL STILL END UP CHECKING OUT THE UNIDENTIFIED PACKAGE ANYHOW.
AND YOU CAN BET THAT MEANS HANDING IT IN TO THE POLICE.
AND WHILE I'M AT IT...

...I ALREADY PREDICTED ...
...THIS BOMB YOU GUYS MADE.
TON (TAP)
.....
THE WAY HE'S PLANNED THIS OUT, IT'S NOT SO MUCH THE SPEED OF MY ARRIVAL BUT THE TIMING THAT'S MORE IMPORTANT FOR GETTING BACK THAT TAPE.
THIS LITTLE BROTHER'S RID HIMSELF OF ANY DISADVANTAGES.
EVEN WITH KOUSUKE-KUN NEAR THE NARUMI HOUSEHOLD, IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW FAST HE GETS THERE.
AND THIS KEY'S THE BOTTLENECK. THERE'S A WAY I COULD OPEN THE MAILBOX WITHOUT USING THE KEY, BUT IT'D TAKE TIME, AND I'D BE IN DANGER OF BEING SPOTTED BY THE OTHER TENANTS.
GYU (SQUEEZE)
MEANING THAT I HAVE TO CARRY THIS WITH ME WHEN I'M ON THE MOVE...
HE'S GIVEN ME TOO GREAT AN OBSTACLE!

チャ
CHA (CHK)
...FINE, THEN.
THE STAGE'S BEEN SET.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO LET NARUMI JUNIOR DIE, YOU'D BETTER BE A GOOD RUNNER.

I WON'T LET YOU GUYS CATCH ME AGAIN.

IT STARTS NOW.

Where are you now?
LET ME SEE ...
I SEE A RIVER ON MY RIGHT.
AND A RAILWAY BRIDGE FOR A TRAIN...
OH! I'M 400 METERS AWAY FROM THE SOUTH END OF THE SHUMARI STATION!
Just great. I'm around some really detached church.
We're more than two kilometers apart right now.
NARUMI-SAN! FIRST LET'S GET THAT BOMB OFF FROM AROUND YOUR NECK!
If you died, this would all be for nothing!!
You should just let them haue the tape...
I CAN'T DO THAT.
UNLESS THE VICTORY IS WHOLE, THERE'S NO POINT TO THIS CHALLENGE.

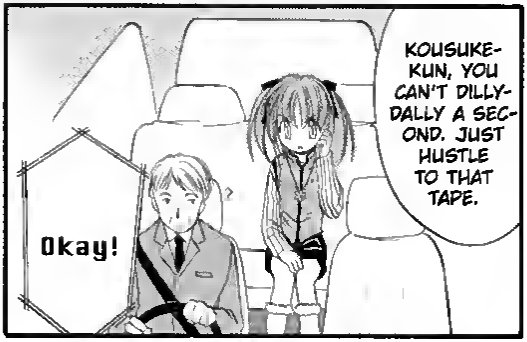
So we have to get the tape first.
MY, AREN'T WE THE FIRM ONE.
And after you were so scared before.
HAAH
はぁ
LISTEN, I WANT TO GET THIS OFF RIGHT AWAY TOO, BUT...
...THANKS TO YOU, I CAN'T.
...COME AGAIN?
YOU WENT TOO FAR.
THEY'RE PAYING SPECIAL ATTEN-TION TO YOU NOW...
...BECAUSE YOU'VE MADE YOURSELF SOMEBODY THEY'D BE BETTER OFF KILLING.

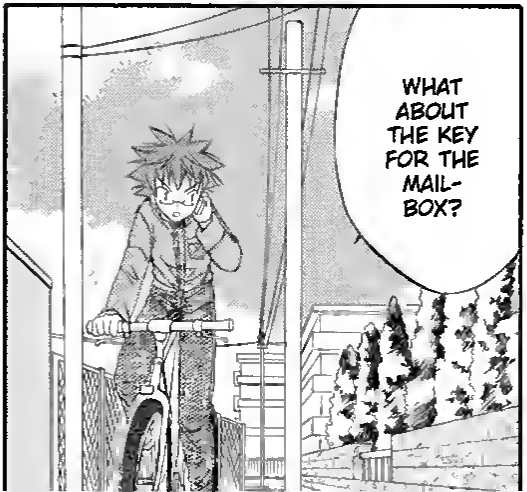
.....
...if they manage to swipe the tape, you'll be dead in no time.
Even when the game's over...
.....
It gives me chills to say this, but we'll leave the defusing for the very end.
SO WORRY ABOUT YOURSELF OVER ME.
FINE. WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO NOW?
IF YOU GET CAUGHT, THERE'S NO POINT IN EVEN CONTINUING THIS.
THE TAPE COMES FIRST.

A TRAIN?
You said you're near Shumari station, right?
Then hurry to the station and get on a train.
SO GIVE THEM THE SLIP UNTIL I'VE GOTTEN AHOLD OF THE TAPE AT LEAST.
WITH SO MANY PEOPLE AROUND, THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING VIOLENT.
YOU'LL BE SAFEST ON A MOVING TRAIN.
THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO BRING YOU TO A CONFINED LOCATION EITHER.
And it should give you the chance to shake them off too.
DO THAT, AND THEN KEEP RIDING THE RAIL BACK AND FORTH.
THEN COME BACK TO SHUMARI STATION AT 2:10 P.M.
IN THOSE LAST TWENTY MINUTES, WE'LL DEAL WITH THE DELIVERY OF THE DEFUSING KEY.

Got it.
2:10 p.m., right?
CONSIDERING THE GUYS I'M ASKING HER TO SHAKE OFF, I'M REALLY CUTTING IT CLOSE TO OUR REMAINING TIME.
ALSO ...
...BE CAREFUL WHICH TRAIN YOU CHOOSE TO RIDE.
IF YOU CHOOSE A BAD ONE, YOU WON'T GET BACK IN TIME FOR THIS TO COME OFF.
UNDER-STOOD.
I SWEAR I'LL MAKE IT BACK IN TIME.
After I get the tape, I'll give you the next set of instruc-tions.
PU (CLICK)
Take care of yourself.
.....
PI (BEEP)

So listen up.
...he's going to leave the delivery of the defusing key for the second half and prioritize getting back the tape first.
He's fully aware of the danger this will mean for himself, but...
I CAN MORE OR LESS FIGURE OUT WHAT THE LITTLE BROTHER'S THINKING.


Okay!
KOUSUKE-KUN, YOU CAN'T DILLY-DALLY A SECOND. JUST HUSTLE TO THAT TAPE.


WHAT ABOUT THE KEY FOR THE MAIL-BOX?

DA (DASH)

I'LL RUN THE RISK OF BEING QUES-TIONED...
I CAN MANAGE THAT, BUT I'LL NEED TWENTY SECONDS.
Find a way to deal with that.
LOOKING AT THE KEY, WE'RE DEALING WITH A PIN CYLINDER LOCK SO...
...WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO PICK IT OPEN INSTEAD.
I HAVE TO USE THIS TIME TO COMPLETELY ELIMINATE ANY CHANCE OF THAT LITTLE BROTHER DEFUSING THE BOMB.
BESIDES, WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO PASS THE KEY ON.
IN ANY CASE, JUST DON'T LET DOWN YOUR GUARD.
IF I CAN'T DO AT LEAST THAT MUCH, I'LL NEVER WIN THIS CHALLENGE!
GOT IT.
RIGHT.

SIGN. SHUMARI STATION

4
FOR THE FIRST HALF, IT'S GETTING HIYONO-SAN...
...TO SOME-WHERE WHERE SHE'LL BE SAFE.
AND THAT'S ON A MOVING TRAIN.
TAN TAN (TMP TMP)
IF SHE MANAGES TO GET AWAY SUCCESSFULLY HERE, IT'LL MAKE DEALING WITH HER DIFFICULT.
SO THIS HAS TO BE WHERE THE LITTLE BROTHER'S MAKING HER GO.
!!
はっ
GASP!

クス
KUSU
(GIGGLE)
SHE FIGURED OUT THAT I'D BE GOING TO THE STATION!
DA
(DASH)
JIRI
(SQUEAK)

2
17
TA
(DASH)
キョロ
KYORO
(LOOK)
MAYBE I SHOULD GO OUT?
BUT THERE'S THE DANGER THAT ASAZUKI-SAN'S WAITING OUTSIDE THE EXIT FOR ME...
LET'S SEE...
WHICH TRAIN SHOULD I TAKE...?
DON
(SHOVE)

DO (THUD)
...OW.
...AH!
PUSH! (PSSSHH)
PII! (TWEEEET)
The train on track two will now be depart-ing.

SIGN: EXPRESS TRAIN

EXCUSE ME...
FOR THE PEOPLE WHO JUST GOT ON THAT EXPRESS TRAIN AND ARE COMING BACK HERE...
...HOW SOON COULD THEY GET BACK?
...?
AH...
LET'S SEE...
IT'LL BE FIFTEEN MINUTES UNTIL THEY REACH THE NEXT STOP, SO...
...EVEN IF THEY TRY TO SWITCH OVER TO THE FASTEST TRAIN BACK OUT...
...IT'LL BE 2:31 P.M.
THOUGH THE TIME OF ARRIVAL COULD BE A LITTLE EARLIER TOO.
...WHY DO YOU ASK?
NO REASON.
JUST WANTED TO MAKE SURE OF SOME-THING.

I SHOULD BE SAFE IN THINKING THAT NOW SHE WON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO DELIVER THE DEFUSING KEY.
KURU (TURN)
SOMETIMES A TRAIN CAN BE A PRISON ON WHEELS.
PEKON (BOW)
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
STILL, EVEN WITHOUT THE KEY, THERE'S A WAY HE CAN SURVIVE THIS.
I GOT FORCED ON A STRANGE TRAIN I DON'T KNOW!
I'M SORRY, NARUMI-SAN!
AND I HAVE TO SNUFF THAT OUT!

I ASKED THE CONDUCTOR, AND HE SAID THAT EVEN IF I TOOK A TAXI, IT'D BE PAST 2:30 BY THE TIME I GOT BACK!
I WON'T MAKE IT BEFORE THE BOMB GOES OFF!
WHAT DO I DO!?
At this rate, the defusing key...!
And your neck, Narumi-san...!
CALM DOWN.
I saw that coming.
HUH?
IT'S GOOD THAT YOU WERE FORCED ON-BOARD.
WITH YOU ON THAT TRAIN, YOU WON'T BE ATTACKED DURING THE GAME.
HA (GASP)
NOW I CAN'T DELIVER THE DEFUSING KEY TO YOU...!
I DON'T CARE ABOUT ME--WHAT ABOUT YOU, NARUMI-SAN!?
Once I can secure the tape, your safety will be guaranteed from now on.
Thank goodness.

UNLIKE MY BROTHER, I'M AN IDIOT.
... NARUMI-SAN.
You're not thinking it's okay if you die as long as I'm saved... right?
IF I CAN'T DO AT LEAST THIS, I WON'T BE ABLE TO PROTECT ANYBODY.
.....
PLEASE ANSWER ME!
THAT...
GYU (SQUEEZE)

THAT WOULDN'T ...
...MAKE ME HAPPY, YOU KNOW...!!
I'M NOT DEAD YET...
THERE'S A WAY I CAN SURVIVE.
AND I'VE MADE ALL THE NECESSARY ARRANGE-MENTS.
.....
DON'T WORRY.
BUT IT ALL DE-PENDS...
...ON HOW MUCH...
...LUCK AND COURAGE I'VE GOT.
SUO

CHAPTER NINETEEN
ALL THAT YOU CAN DO

THERE'S A WAY I CAN SURVIVE.
THE LITTLE GIRL SAID SHE HAD A TRIGGER FOR DETONATING THE BOMB ON HER...
...WHICH MUST MEAN SHE CARRIES ONE TO CANCEL IT TOO.
IF ANYTHING, SHE MUST HAVE A SPARE KEY ON HER.
I'M GAMBLING ON THAT.
GAM-BLING ...?
WHAT'RE YOU PLANNING TO DO?
THE EXPLOSIVE BLAST FOR THIS THING IS SMALL, BUT...
...COUPLED WITH A LARGE AMOUNT OF OIL, IT CAN BE PRETTY BIG.

THROUGH THAT EXPLOSION, I'LL CREATE A SITUATION THAT'LL TRAP HER TOO.
A SITUATION IN WHICH, IF SHE DOESN'T CANCEL THE BOMB, SHE'LL DIE WITH ME.
A THREAT LIKE THAT...
...ISN'T GOING TO WORK ON RIO-SAN, I DON'T THINK...
I'll listen to your naysaying later.
Right now, just let me focus on getting the tape back.
PU (CLICK)
AH!
TSUUU (BEEEEEP)
G-Phone
... Narumi-san.
PON (PAT)

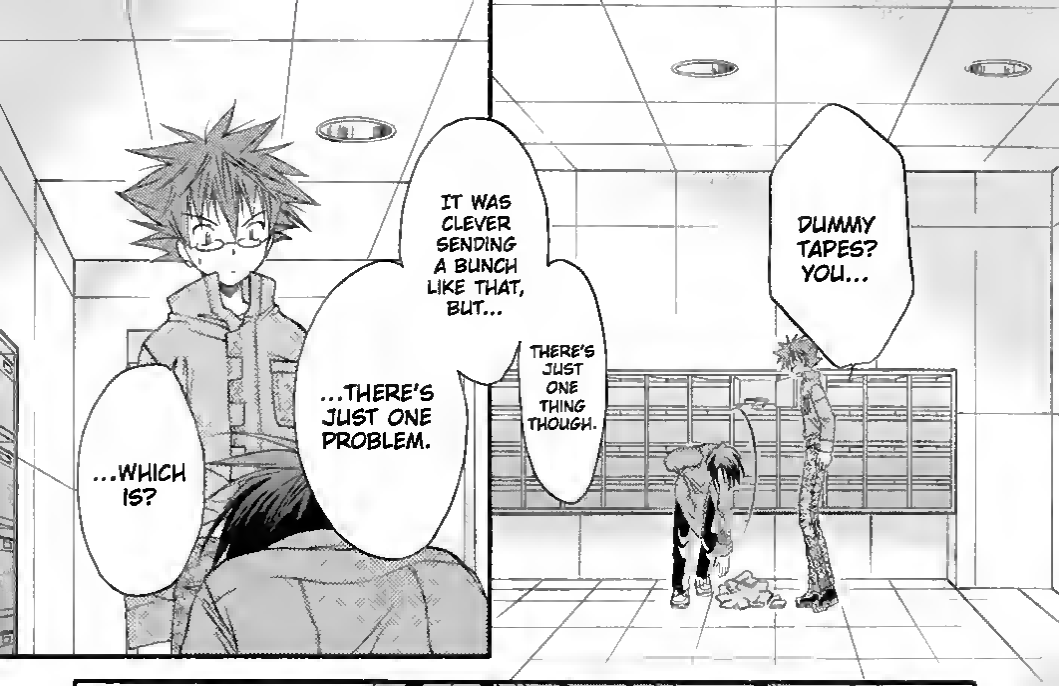
BA (TURN)
!?
BIKU (STARTLE)
...EXCUSE ME, BUT...
...PLEASE REFRAIN FROM USING YOUR CELL PHONE WHILE ON THE TRAIN.
AH... YES... SIR.

DON'T DIE ON ME... NARUMI-SAN...
PM 2:03 21
.....
ANY MINUTE NOW, EH?
BURORORO (VROOM)
KII (SCREECH)
.....
SUI (TURN)
DO (PUT) DO DO DO
GOSO (RUMMAGE)

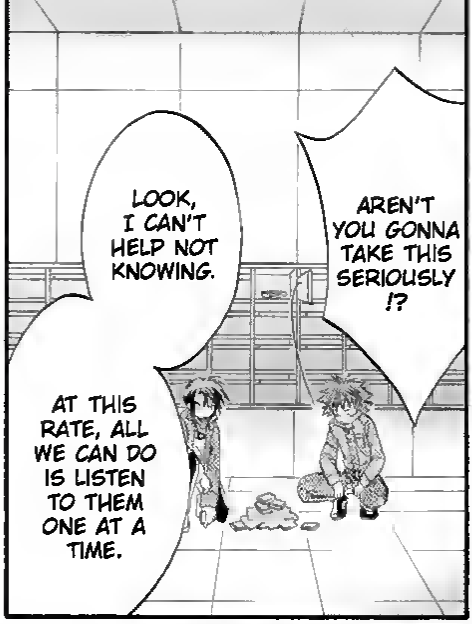
WITH THAT, THE LOCK'LL OPEN!
I'LL PUSH ALL THE PINS UP WITH THE PICK, THEN SECURE THEM WITH A TENSION WRENCH, AND LASTLY TURN THE CLUTCH...
CHARI (CLINK)
TO LESSEN THE CHANCES OF BEING SEEN BY SOMEBODY, I CAN'T TAKE MORE THAN TWENTY SECONDS IN WORKING IT.
IF I FIGURE IT OUT QUICKLY, I CAN DO IT IN TEN SECONDS.
I CAN'T MESS THIS UP.
A PRO WOULD ONLY TAKE A FEW SECONDS.
GASHO (PLOP)
SU (SNEAK)
BURORORORO (VROOOOM)

I HAVE THE FIRST MOVE!
NARUMI JUNIOR HASN'T ARRIVED YET.
TA (TMP)
CHA (CHK)
DONE! IT'S OPEN!
GACHA (KLATCH)
KACHA
KACHA (CLICK)
KACHA

SFX: DOT DOT DOT
トン
.....
ボト
BOTO
ボト
BOTO (DROP) BOTO
ボト
BOTO
ドシャ
DOSHA (TUMBLE)
WHAT IS THIS!?
TO THROW YOU-OFF, I SENT A HEAP OF-DUMMY TAPES TOO.
PRETTY CRAZY, EH?
!
OH, SORRY 'BOUT THAT.


DUMMY TAPES? YOU...
THERE'S JUST ONE THING THOUGH.
IT WAS CLEVER SENDING A BUNCH LIKE THAT, BUT...
...THERE'S JUST ONE PROBLEM.
...WHICH IS?

AS FOR WHICH ONE'S THE REAL THING...
...EVEN I CAN'T TELL.


AREN'T YOU GONNA TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY !?
LOOK, I CAN'T HELP NOT KNOWING.
AT THIS RATE, ALL WE CAN DO IS LISTEN TO THEM ONE AT A TIME.

MUKAAA (PISSED)
むか
MAYBE I'LL BE ABLE TO TELL FROM THE HANDWRITING OF THE ADDRESS...
NAH... THERE'S GOTTA BE SOMETHING MORE OBVIOUS THAN THAT...

.....
COULD THIS GET ANY STUPIDER ...?
I MEAN, REALLY!

GOSO (HUNT)
ゴソ
GOSO
ゴソ

!!
GAAA (VRRRR)
...HM?
GYO (SHOCK)
ギョ

YOU FRIGGIN' ...!
BA (TURN)
NO LETTING DOWN YOUR GUARD.
REMEMBER?
NI (GRIN)

GO, SHOOTING STAR!
GASHA (CRANK)
W-WAIT, YOU SNEAKY LITTLE ...!!
YOU...
YOU BIKE THIEF!!
HUFF HUFF
KIRAN (TWINKLE)
キラン
.....

I'M SUCH AN IDIOT.
...I'M AN IDIOT.
GAKU (DROOP)
.....
AS A LAST RESORT, WITHOUT THE DEFUSING KEY, THE LITTLE BROTHER ...
...WILL RELY ON THE CANCEL-LATION SWITCH I'VE GOT WITH ME.
I'M SURE HE'LL TRY TO TURN IT INTO A SITUATION WHERE HE CAN BE IN CONTROL.
AND KNOWING HOW HE IS...
...HE MADE ARRANGE-MENTS FOR THIS EVEN BEFORE THE GAME.

AND IF HE DID THAT, HE MOST LIKELY CHOSE A SPOT WHERE IT WOULDN'T CAUSE TOO MUCH DAMAGE TO THE SURROUNDING AREAS WHEN IT WENT OFF.
...BY HAVING A LARGE ENOUGH AMOUNT OF OIL OR GASOLINE CATCH FIRE AT THE SAME TIME IT EXPLODES.
...HE'D HAVE TO WIDEN THE AREA COVERED BY THAT SMALL EXPLOSIVE...
TO CREATE A SITUATION IN WHICH I'D DIE IF I DIDN'T DEFUSE IT...
...IT WOULD BE THIS RIVER BASIN AND NOWHERE ELSE...!
AND IF I WERE TO THINK OF A SPOT LIKE THAT IN THIS CITY...
PHEW.
ふぅ
GOSO (RUMMAGE)
ゴソ
SO SOMEWHERE ALONG THE RIVERBED...
...HE MUST HAVE HIDDEN A GASOLINE CANISTER FILLED WITH OIL.

PAN (CLAP) PAN
...I'LL BE SURE TO FIND IT.
!
SO IF I LOOK THERE...
ゴト...
GOTO (CLUNK)
I KNOW FOR SURE IT'S SOMEWHERE PEOPLE WOULDN'T COME.
NOW I'M GONNA WIN!
MMPH!
ZHRU (DRAG)
BINGO!

SFX: PIRO PIRO PIII (RRRRING RRING)
THERE GOES LITTLE BROTHER'S PATH TO SALVATION!!
Ooooo
KOU-SUKE?
THIS IS BAD, RIO!
PIIIPIROROROOO (RRRRINGALIIINNG)
He took the tape!!

WHAT HAP-PENED?
WELL...
.....
...and that's what hap-pened.
KOUSUKE-KUN, YOU...
GAN (SHOCK)
...IDIOT!
W-WHAT COULD I DO!?
HE'D BEEN ACTING WEIRD SINCE YESTER-DAY!

THAT'S THE BLOOD OF KIYOTAKA-SAMA.
THAT ...
... RESOLVE.
If he's really gambling with his life...
...how can he laugh so lightly like that!?
.....
THAT REALLY IS...
...WHAT MAKES HIM EXACTLY LIKE KIYO-TAKA.
Just to be safe, go to Shumari station, Kou-suke-kun.
There's still a chance Hiyono-san'll come back just in time.
So should I get the tape back from him?
IT'S OKAY. HE'S HEADED MY WAY ALREADY.

I WANT TO SETTLE THIS ONE-ON-ONE AT THE VERY END.
BESIDES ...
ポコン
POKON (CLUNK)
...You don't need any backup?
...THE LITTLE BROTHER IS...
...AS GOOD AS DEAD ALREADY.
Yatult

I'VE CLEARED LEVEL ONE.
NEXT UP IS...
ゴシ
GOSHI (WIPE)
SFX: GOKU (GULP)
ゴク
...WHETHER I CAN GET THIS OFF OR NOT.
ピッ
PI (BEEP)
PURURURURU (RRRRING)
プルルルル
SU (SCOOP)
ス

PU (CLICK)
NARUMI-SAN!?
PURURURURU (RRRRING)
!
YO.
WHERE ARE YOU NOW?
AT UCHIYAMA STATION!
SO LISTEN TO THIS!
THE QUICKEST TRAIN BACK FROM HERE IS THE 2:16 EXPRESS TRAIN.
AFTER ASKING AROUND, IT SEEMS THAT WILL ARRIVE AT SHUMARI STATION AT 2:30 ON THE DOT, IF NOT A LITTLE EARLIER!

If I hand over the defusing key to you the minute the train slides into the platform, we might be able to make it in time!
NOPE, THAT'S NO GOOD.
ASAZUKI'S WAITING AT THE STATION TO KEEP US FROM DOING JUST THAT.
Don't talk about stuff you don't know.
WHAT!?
WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN!?
I KNOW THAT MUCH...
I WON'T LEAD YOU DOWN THE WRONG PATH.
JUST FOLLOW MY INSTRUCTIONS.
...OKAY?
.....

Narumi-san.
UNDER-STOOD.
.....
Be careful...
.....
PI (BEEP)

GUESS I SHOULD GET GOING.
YONTORY COFFEE
VOSS
...THAT DOES IT.
GU (GRAB)
.....
MY WOUNDS HURT AS I'D EXPECTED...

BINGO.
WILL YOU MEET ME NOW?
PI (BEEP)
Caffe
LITTLE BROTHER?
PIROPIPIPI!! (RRRINGALIIIING)
!!
.....
YOU WANT ME TO TAKE THE BOMB OFF YOU, RIGHT?
YOU WANT TO STEAL THE TAPE, RIGHT?

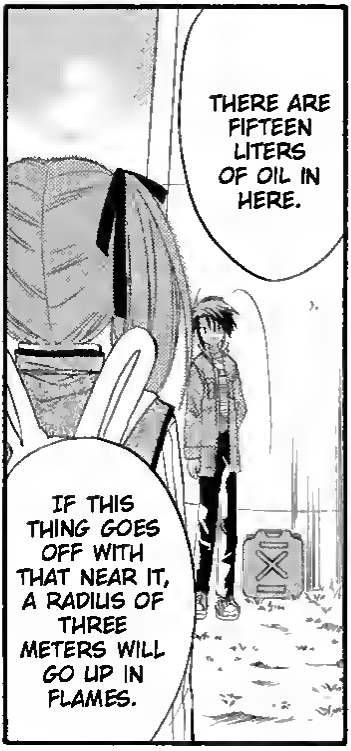
...FINE.
KUSU (GIGGLE)
WHERE SHALL WE MEET?
JARI (CRUNCH)
YOU'VE GOT FIVE MINUTES BEFORE YOUR NECK EXPLODES.

YOU'RE RIGHT.
IF WE DON'T DO THIS QUICK, I'M DEAD MEAT.
SU (RAISE)
WHAT YOU'RE AFTER...
...IS THIS HERE, ISN'T IT?
YOU BROUGHT IT, EH?
YOU'RE A REAL LIFE-SAVER.
.....
THERE'S NO WAY I'M PUSHING THE BUTTON, THOUGH.

THERE'S NO WAY I'M DYING.
NO, ACTU-ALLY.
YOU'RE GOING TO DIE.

ZA (SCUFF)

AND YOU'RE STAND-ING...
...RIGHT INSIDE THAT AREA.


THERE ARE FIFTEEN LITERS OF OIL IN HERE.
IF THIS THING GOES OFF WITH THAT NEAR IT, A RADIUS OF THREE METERS WILL GO UP IN FLAMES.

IF YOU DON'T PRESS THAT CANCEL BUTTON...
...YOU'RE GONNA DIE TOO.
KUSU (GIGGLE)
YOU REALLY THINK THERE'S OIL IN THAT TANK THERE?
I ALREADY REFILLED THAT TANK WITH WATER.
SO THAT THREAT'S NOT GONNA WORK ON ME.
ALL THAT'S LEFT FOR YOU IS DEATH.

AND WITH THAT, I COMPLETELY WIN THIS FIGHT!
AFTER YOUR COLLAR EXPLODES ...
...I'LL JUST SNATCH UP THE TAPE FROM YOUR DEAD BODY.
スッ
SU (SHOW)
.....
BY TAPE...
...DID YOU MEAN THIS?

IT'S JUST A DUMMY TAPE ANYWAY.
ZA (SLIDE)
!?
HYU (TOSS)
IF YOU WANT IT, I'LL GIVE IT TO YOU RIGHT NOW.
HOW ...!?
THE REAL ONE'S STILL BACK IN THE MAILBOX AT THE APARTMENT.
ALL I DID WAS SHOW ASAZUKI THE PARCEL I'D BEEN CARRYING FROM EARLIER AND RUN OFF.
DID YOU REALLY THINK THAT I'D BE ABLE TO CHOOSE AND TAKE THE REAL TAPE WITHOUT ASAZUKI NOTICING?

THE KIND MANAGER'S GOING TO PUT THE MOUNTAIN OF TAPES BACK IN THE MAIL-BOX.
AND IN THE END, HIYONO'LL GET AHOLD OF THE REAL ONE, AND IT'LL ALL BE OVER.
YOU'RE THE ONES WHO THOUGHT I'D RE-GAINED THE ORIGINAL TAPE.
I TOLD HER TO TAKE A TAXI BACK TO THE APART-MENT.
SHE'LL PROBABLY GET THERE AT 2:40, LATEST.
AND ASAZUKI'S ALREADY AT SHUMARI STATION, RIGHT?
EVEN IF YOU COULD CONTACT HIM, HIYONO'LL STILL BEAT HIM.
YOU GUYS ARE THE LOSERS IN THIS GAME.
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT...

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT THIS MEANS...
...I ACTED JUST AS THIS LITTLE BROTHER EXPECTED ME TO!?
YOU DIDN'T SEE THIS COMING?
YOU WOULDN'T, NOW WOULD YOU?
YOU PRIORITIZED KILLING ME FIRST.
AND I PRIORITIZED SAVING HER FIRST.

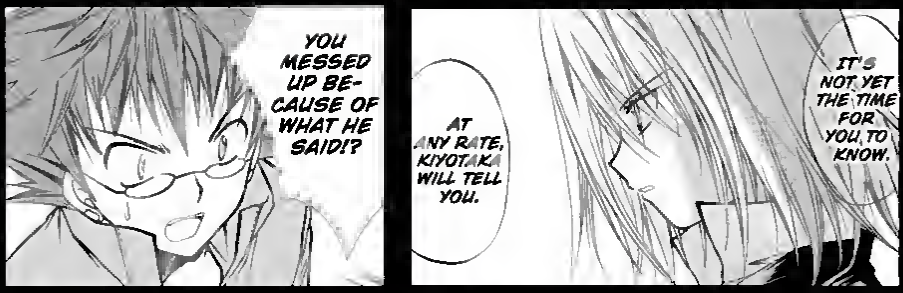
YOU FAILED TO TAKE THAT INTO ACCOUNT.
IT'S GOING TO BE A PAIN HAVING THAT REACH THE POLICE. BUT I'LL ACQUIESCE TO RUNNING THAT RISK.
...FINE.
I RECOGNIZE MY LOSS REGARDING THE TAPE.
.....
...EVEN IF YOU PROTECTED HIYONO-SAN...
...YOU CANNOT AVOID YOUR OWN DEATH!
...HOW-EVER...

I ALREADY FORESAW YOU SWITCHING THE CONTENTS OF THE TANK.
I KNEW FROM THE GET-GO IT WOULDN'T WORK.
.....
HMPH
...YOU REALLY THINK SO?
THAT BLUFF WON'T WORK...
...ON ME...
FUWA (WAFT)

Spiral THE BONDS OF REASONING 4 THE END

AYUMU VS. RIO, A REMATCH AGAINST FATE,
AND THE COMPLETE RESOLUTION!!

THE SEETHING MYSTERY AND
THE UNAVOIDABLE REALITY...



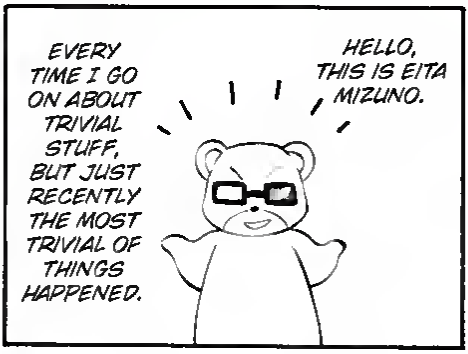
FATE'S NEXT CALLER APPEARS, AND HIS GOAL
IS TO COMPLETELY ERADICATE THE BLADE CHILDREN!!!

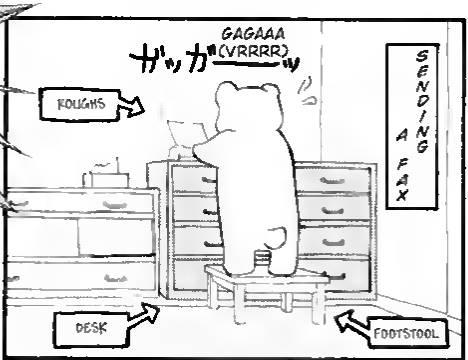
IN THE NEXT VOLUME, THE SPIRAL OF
DESTINY BEGINS TO PULSATE.

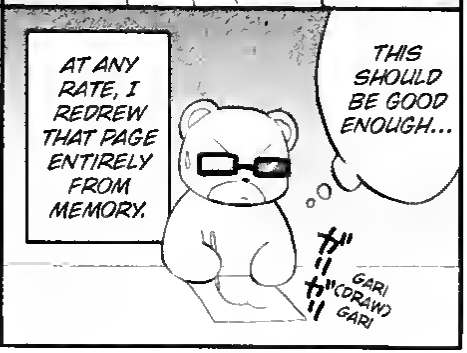
To be continued. Please wait!

spiral work diary

—THIS TIME WE'RE INVADING THE BACK COVER—



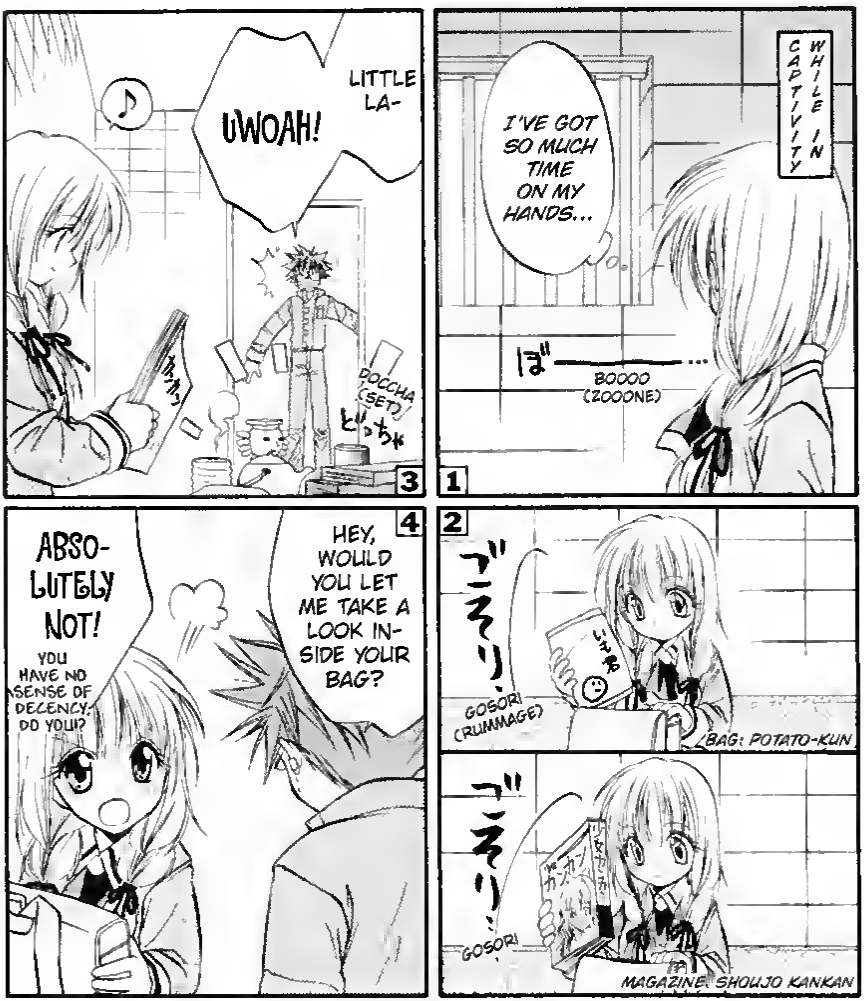




Spiral 4

THE BONDS OF REASONING

Omake!



SPIRAL
The Bonds of Reasoning ④

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